

# Women's Notions of Rights and Empowerment

A Case Study on MASUM's Area of Intervention  
in Rural Maharashtra



Grass Roots Initiatives for Social Transformation (GRIST)





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in Rural Maharashtra

**Conducted by**

**Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women (KFAW),  
Kitakyushu, Japan**

**and**

**Grass Roots Initiatives for Social Transformation (GRIST),  
Pune, India**

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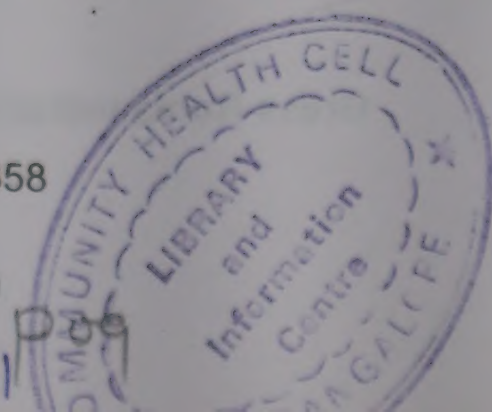
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# *Preface*

We are pleased to publish the report on the enquiry into 'Women's' Notions of Rights And Empowerment :A Case Study on MASUM's Area of Intervention in Rural Maharashtra'. This study of women's notions of rights was jointly undertaken by Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women (KFAW), Kitakyushu, Japan and Grass Roots Initiatives for Social Transformation (GRIST) of Pune, India. The Purpose was to document women's perception of rights and wrongs, their awareness of rights and human rights, their attitude towards the needs based and the rights-based approach, their problem solving strategies in the use of rights based strategies and the strength of collective action vis-à-vis the rights-based approach and the human rights framework.

MASUM was chosen a case study for various reasons. First, it is an organization that has consistently encouraged and actively abetted women's individual and collective leadership through multiple foci of empowerment. Second, it works with the rights-based approach by reiterating State obligation for the fulfillment of services, whether of health care, education or of public and subsidized distribution of food. Third the community contact of MASUM over the past twenty years made it incredibly easy to contact women and to conduct numerous focus group discussions with them. Needless to say the methodology included strict ethical considerations so that respondents' rights were not violated in any way. The purpose of the research was not to pit or compare the 'community' women against the MASUM staff, since the latter also are themselves women from the same community. The intention was to document what women see as rights, entitlements and human rights in the context of their own lives. Responses from the rural staff of MASUM helped us to see the change that occurs when women are exposed to the language of rights and to the human rights discourse. The story that emerges is one of deep and dynamic commitment to a progressive social change that is based on non-discrimination and equality.

Prasanna Invally conducted the research, analysed the data and prepared the first draft on behalf of GRIST. Manisha Gupte designed the methodology. The women participants from the focus group discussions from Malshiras and Waghapur villages, and the MASUM rural staff that also participated in the study were the principal actors. They provided information, shared insights and gave tremendous hope to all of us for a better tomorrow. They willingly agreed that their names be printed in this preface. Atsuko Miwa represented the Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women (KFAW). Aida Teshome, an intern from the School of



Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London, edited and finalized the document. Mikaela Lee Wilson, also from SOAS took over from Aida Teshome and worked on the final draft. Ravindra Thipse supervised the publication of the report that got printed at Anita Printers, Pune.

Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women (KFAW) and Grass Roots Initiatives for Social Transformation (GRIST) are grateful to each one mentioned above, without whose inputs this study would never been successfully completed.

We hope that this small qualitative enquiry reaffirms the commitment of other community-based groups to engage with the discourse of human rights and collective leadership as a means to ensure a life of dignity and equality for all people, especially those that are marginalized in terms of caste, class, gender and religion.

*Manisha Gupte and Dr. Ramesh Awasthi*

*Directors, GRIST (of ISIS Foundation)*

*Pune, India*



## Chapter 1

# Introduction

### Using the Rights-Based Approach in Development

Since the late 1990s there has been a significant shift in the approach taken by worldwide development agencies from the formerly more common “Needs-Based” to a “Rights-Based” approach. As the former depends entirely on the benevolence of the donor, It is arguable that this not only lacks the existence of duties and accountability but also deprives the receiver of independent choice making, self- determination and places her in a submissive position. Therefore, interventions for the fulfillment of basic needs have now adapted the rights-based approach, with gender-related projects being often associated with the latter.

In contrast the right- based approach aims not only at providing basic needs of the receivers, but moreover it aims at restructuring a society and reformulating value- systems within that society. Though this approach has a strong conceptual legitimacy with universality of human rights, in many parts of the world universal human rights are however regarded as products of the “West” and their introduction and application face heavy opposition. Yet, organisations like MASUM have applied this approach for the past 20 years. Thus it is important to see whether the women whom MASUM has worked with have understood and accepted the rights- based approach and if they believe and apply it in their lives.

The Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women Kitakyushu (KFAW), Japan and Grass Roots Initiatives for Social Transformation (GRIST) of Isis Foundation, Pune have jointly conducted a study to verify usefulness, achievement, challenges and limitations of the rights-based approach after twenty years of its application. Ergo as a field research project, a small and quick documentation of MASUM’s work has been undertaken in order to understand how women have accessed rights in a rural Indian community.

This case study can help us to understand whether rural women accept the rights based approach and the human rights framework or whether they reject it as being western and contrary to their culture. It will also document the journey and trajectory of women from the same community, from their original perceptions of women's rights to the perceptions they have acquired after associating with a progressive women's organisation.

Finally, the study would provide an insight into how women, when given the opportunity to assert these rights, can bring about a change in the lives of those who are discriminated against and marginalised in the society.

## About MASUM

Mahila Sarvangeen Utkarsh Mandal (MASUM) was established in 1987 in the rural, drought prone blocks of Pune and Ahmednagar districts with the following objectives,

- ☞ To make women self reliant and conscious of their human and constitutional human rights and to put pressure on the State to fulfilling its obligation towards its people.
- ☞ To nurture women's physical and emotional health.
- ☞ To provide vocational training and credit facilities to women for self-employment.
- ☞ To create a sustainable and humane mode of development through people's active involvement in rural Maharashtra.
- ☞ To create a progressive space in society for all its deprived people, and to specifically resist casteism, sexism, religious chauvinism and homophobia
- ☞ To work towards the elimination of discrimination, inequality, intolerance and violence—both, within and outside the home.
- ☞ To work towards the creation of a society based on equality, freedom, democracy, diversity and peace.

MASUM works in 40 villages on identification and early treatment of women's illnesses through self-examination, micro- credit, and violence against women, minority rights, and secularism and on strengthening democratic and collective decision-making at the community level. Most of its work is carried out by local activists from the community. Over the past eight years MASUM has developed as a credible training institute at the state and national levels, in areas of women's healthcare, gender sensitization and mainstreaming of gender issues, violence against women, human rights, sexuality, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR). Over the past decade, MASUM has published user-friendly material to address issues of women's healthcare at the community level.



MASUM believes in the concept of substantive equality, works to bring about social change to eliminate discrimination, especially of women who are repeatedly discriminated against. It believes that the discriminated ones can become the agents and leaders of social change.

## **Introduction of the Organisations Involved in the Research**

### ***Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women, Kitakyushu, Japan***

The Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women (KFAW) in Kitakyushu, Japan was founded in 1990 to advance the status of women in Asia through solidarity and development that is sustainable and equitable. Semi-governmental KFAW promotes various activities under the theme of “Coming together to help and learning from each another”, including surveys, international exchange programs and seminars, collection and distribution of information, etc. Four principles that guide the KFAW activities are as follows,

#### **1 Getting People to Participate**

The KFAW is promoting feelings of goodwill and solidarity with people across Asia.

#### **2 Comprehensive Commitment with Women’s Issues**

The KFAW is fully dedicated to assist women in their empowerment.

#### **3 Creating a New Urban Environment**

By promoting international cooperation, the KFAW is creating a new urban environment in Kitakyushu.

#### **4 A Global Perspective**

With recognition and respect toward diversity amongst Asian nations, KFAW is contributing to achieving equality, development and peace.

Hiroko Hashimoto of Jumonji University and Atsuko Miwa of Kyoto Human Rights Research Institute are visiting researchers of KFAW for the fiscal years 2005 and 2006.

### ***GRIST, Isis Foundation, Pune, India***

Isis Foundation is a non-profit organisation registered in Pune. Grass Roots Initiatives for Social Transformation (GRIST) a programme of the Isis Foundation focuses on development issues through training and capacity building. Isis was the Greek goddess of civilisation and thus Isis Foundation, Pune, is committed to the creation of a new civilisation based on equality, social justice, secularism, pluralism and democracy. GRIST (meaning the grain harvest that goes to the mill for grinding) concentrates on making human rights truly accessible to people in the way that the ground-up grain is made ready for eating. This report is the first activity of GRIST.





## Chapter 2

# Methodology

The research is qualitative in its nature. It has explored the following areas understanding of rights and human rights among women from two villages; the use of the premise of rights for empowerment and problem-solving; how and to what extent it is being used; the actual social change that has occurred; the projected social change that the women perceive and the challenges that women and MASUM face.

### Objective

To verify the usefulness, achievements, challenges and limitations of the rights-based approach and the changes that have been brought about in the lives of women from the villages after its application by MASUM for over 20 years.

### Hypotheses

*The study will test the following two hypotheses.*

- (1) Rural women accept the rights-based approach and the human rights framework when introduced it.
- (2) The rights-based approach has proved effective in positively changing the lives of women in terms of being able to take charge of significant aspects of their lives.

### Definition of the Key Concepts Used in the Study

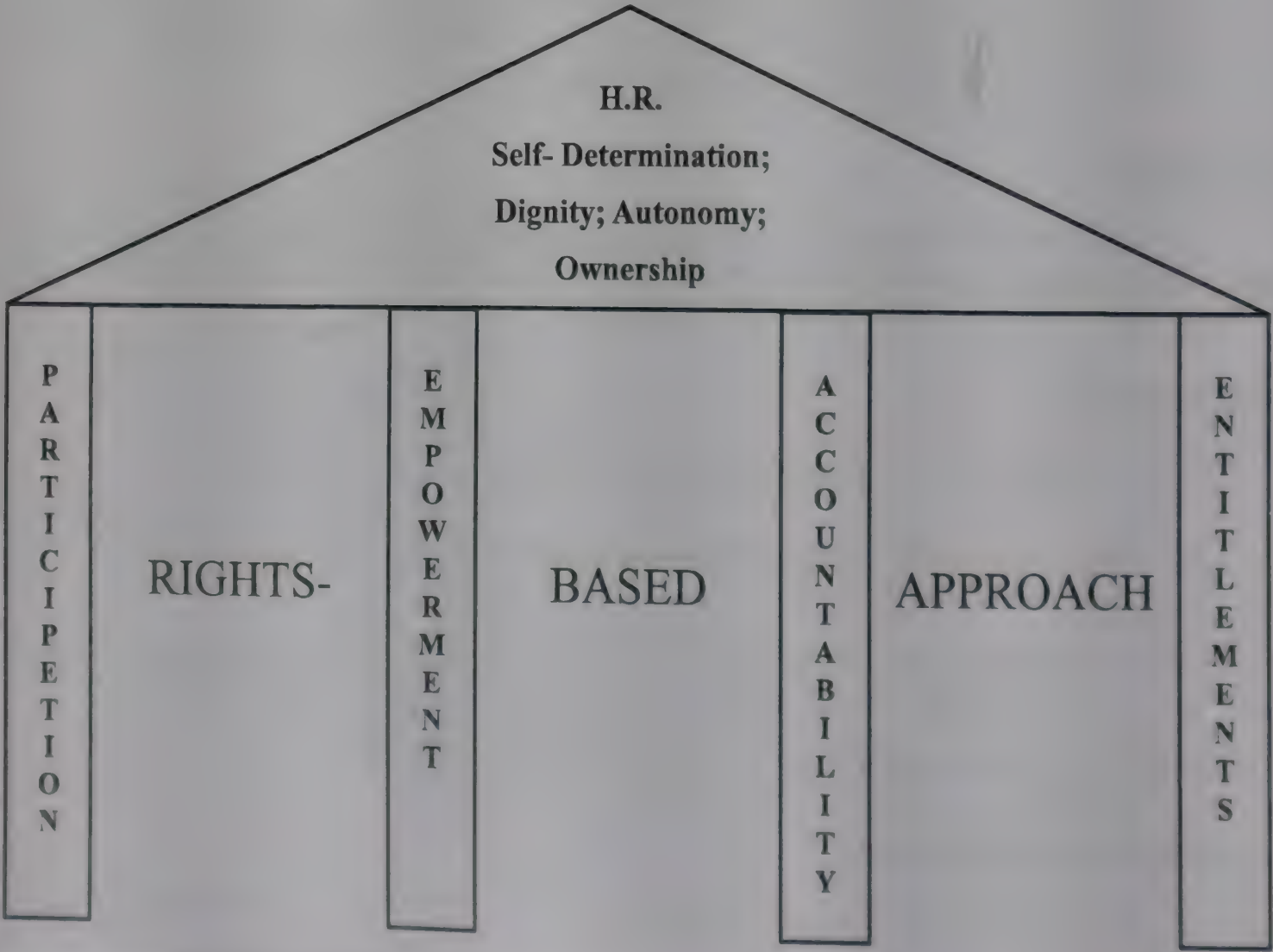
#### *Rights-Based Approach*

The constituents of rights-based approach used by MASUM in its work with women are

- ☞ Women's Participation – active, free and meaningful
- ☞ Empowerment – generating strength and power, capacity-building, capability enhancement, providing access to information, resources and opportunities, (especially to vulnerable, marginalised communities)
- ☞ Accountability – of duty-holders (their legal obligation) and other key stake holders (their moral obligation) to the active right-holders
- ☞ Creating express linkages to international and local instruments which provide legally enforceable entitlements.

*The goal is to achieve universal Human Rights standards, such as*

- 1 **Self- Determination** – Putting women in charge of their own lives, so as to control their own destinies
- 2 **Ownership** – The process, influence and outcomes, for sustainability





## Acceptance

Acceptance of the rights-based approach depends on the extent to which the women know, understand, use and are willing to access, claim and demand rights. Operationally, this concept has been measured on the basis of the following criteria.

- ☞ Level of awareness of rights: ability to name and identify rights, rights holders, duty holders and other stake holders.
- ☞ Ability to identify areas of discrimination, inequality and inequity (caste, class, gender)
- ☞ Ability to identify instruments that can be used to claim, protect or realise rights (legally - enforceable instruments), and access to mechanisms for ensuring entitlements.
- ☞ Attitudes about rights vis-à-vis existing social norms and social sanctions; alteration of attitudes among women due to MASUM's use of rights based approach, compromises they make or are willing to make, problem-solving strategies they use and are familiar with and the importance given to one right over another
- ☞ Motivation to use the premise of rights for elimination of discrimination and inequality and for problem solving.
- ☞ Women's belief in the possibility of changing their own lives by applying strategies based on the frame-work of the rights-based approach.
- ☞ Willingness to take responsibility and ownership to bring about a change.
- ☞ Women's collective pressure for state accountability on governance systems, other public institutions as well as in the other duty holders.

## Effectiveness

Effectiveness of the rights-based approach in **positively changing** the women's lives has been tested on the basis of

- ☞ The actual and purposeful efforts to apply the rights-based approach in order to bring about changes in the women's personal lives
- ☞ Any back-lash that women faced due to ushering in this change
- ☞ Women's understanding and belief in collective action and in the collective strength of vulnerable groups
- ☞ Contribution of empowered women to support other vulnerable and marginalised women, in order to protect, claim, realise and enjoy their rights
- ☞ Women's abilities and efforts made to hold duty-holders and other stake- holders accountable.

- ☞ Positively changing the women's lives means that they are able to make conscious decisions, to exercise their choices and to take control of their lives

## **Sampling**

Two of the villages in which MASUM operates, Malshiras and Waghapur, were chosen by the organisation's staff members. These particular villages were selected because between 5-7 local staff members lived there, which made Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) possible for the purpose of this research.

### ***Three samples were used in this study***

#### **Sample 'a'**

Local women from the two villages who are not staff members of MASUM. They will be referred to as "village women" throughout the report.

#### **Sample 'b'**

(village staff) Local women from the two villages who have been trained and employed by MASUM and have similar social backgrounds as sample 'a'. They will be referred to as "village staff" throughout the report.

#### **Sample 'c'**

All staff members of MASUM, including those who are active in other villages. They are all engaged in rights-based work.

## **Sample Size**

#### **Sample 'a'**

It consisted of two groups in each village, i.e. four groups in total. Women were placed into focus groups according to the caste they belonged to – Marathas, *Balutedars* (artisans) and *Dalits*. Each group was comprised of 16 women. The total number of women was 64.

#### **Sample 'b'**

It consisted of two groups in each of the two villages. The total number of women was 12.

#### **Sample 'c'**

The total number of women was 25.

## **Tools of Data Collection**

- ☞ Questionnaires were used among sample 'a' and sample 'b'.



- ☞ FGDs using case stories and statements on needs and rights for discussion among samples 'a' and 'b'.
- ☞ Ranking exercise was conducted among samples 'a' and 'b', where rights were enlisted according to the importance given to them and juxtaposed against social norms which violate rights.
- ☞ Guided group discussion took place with sample 'c'.

Both, acceptance and effectiveness of this approach were qualitatively assessed by comparing the two samples 'a' and 'b'. While sample 'a' had merely been exposed to the rights-based perspective of MASUM, sample 'b' had been active members of MASUM and had been applying the rights-based approach. In other words, sample 'b' differed from sample 'a' in the sense that the former had a higher level of exposure, participation (active, meaningful and willful), capacities, and access to information and opportunity to use the rights-based approach. They also had access to a supportive environment enabling them to play a leadership role in the community. Being members of the MASUM team they too had become duty-holders, who had a moral obligation towards the vulnerable and marginalised women of the community. The socio-economic and cultural backgrounds of both sample 'a' and sample 'b' were similar.

## ***Ethical Considerations***

- ☞ Confidentiality was maintained wherever women wanted it, i.e. if any woman wished not to have her name mentioned in the report then her name was changed – however, if any woman wanted her name to be part of the report, she got that visibility by right.
- ☞ Informed consent was considered essential for participation in every meeting more specifically.

### ***Informed***

Information about the reasons, the process, the purpose and conditions of the research and the rights of both parties (researchers and participants) were

- a) Read out before every meeting
- b) Handed out in written form to the participants before every meeting

### ***Consent***

- ☞ In order to demonstrate and provide evidence of willful consent on parts of the participants to engage in the study, the active and physical action of taking a badge which was handed out by the researcher, writing their name on it and pinning it up onto their clothes was required before every meeting.
- ☞ Respondents were free not to participate in consecutive meetings (process of

obtaining informed consent was reiterated each time)

- ☞ Permission for audio-video taping of the meetings and for taking photographs was obtained from the respondents.
- ☞ Data was taken back to the respondents prior to sending the results to Kyoto and before publication.
- ☞ A simplified Marathi version of the study findings was given out to each respondent.
- ☞ FGDs were held according to the caste and class dynamics of the village so that no one felt intimidated in the presence of powerful people and none of the information was used against them later on.
- ☞ MASUM has a strong presence in both these villages and so in the unlikely event of information being used against a respondent, our local staff members ensured unstinted support to the respondent(s).
- ☞ No information that could incriminate any respondent was used for public campaigning, unless the respondent(s) desired that it be used. Issues were generalised before they were taken up for any future campaigns, community mobilisation or advocacy.
- ☞ Respondents did not get paid for participating in the research. However, snacks were served during the meetings and a small souvenir was given to each respondent at the end of the study.
- ☞ An ethical committee reviewed the study design before it was launched. A token honorarium was paid to the two reviewers in India.
- ☞ Members of the Ethics committee were Dr. Jaya Sagade, Head of Women and Law Department, ILS Law College, Pune and Dr. Sunita Bundewar, Senior Research Officer at the Centre for Studies in Ethics and Rights (CSER), Mumbai.
- ☞ Since this study was about MASUM's impact on women's understanding of human rights, no person who is on the pay roll of MASUM was paid for this study.
- ☞ An external person, namely Prasanna Invally conducted the study whereas Manisha Gupte devised the design and content of the research. Prasanna Invally was accompanied by one or two field level persons from MASUM so that the understanding generated through this study was not wasted and could be used for future interventions
- ☞ Staff members from Malshiras and Waghapur who participated in this study had no prior access to the exercises or questions, nor did they participate in the FGDs of local women. This was to avoid a situation where the staff members would have any undue advantage over the other women.



## Chapter 3

# Process Of Data Collection

Two villages, Malshiras and Waghapur, in the area of Purandar taluka in which MASUM has been working since its inception in 1987 were chosen for the study.

Only those women from the villages were able to take part in the study who had participated in at least one or more programmes of MASUM. Those who were also employed by MASUM were categorised as “village staff/ sample b”. All the other women were categorised as “the villages women/ sample a”.

*The following criteria were further laid for the selection of the respondents*

- 1 About 50% of respondents selected were from the “*Dalit*” castes (*Balutedar* (artisan) communities), and 50% were “open” category/ castes mostly the Marathas.
- 2 All were literate although many were possibly not very skilled at reading and writing due to lack of practice.
- 3 All were adults – above the age of 18.
- 4 The marital status of women respondents was mixed, i.e. the groups consisted of married women as well as single women - that included unmarried women, widows, deserted and divorced women.
- 5 There was no upper age limit.
- 6 The selection was made by the village staff who were able to contact and apprise the village women.

The FGDs for the group of *Dalit* women and the group of non-*Dalit* women from

each of the two villages were conducted separately<sup>1</sup>. Thus, sample 'a' of the study comprises of four groups of *Dalit* and non-*Dalit* village women of Malshiras and Waghapur. The women spent one whole day with the research investigators as this was more convenient for them. Similarly the two groups of village staff from the two villages also spent a whole day with the research investigators for the purpose of this research.

*The process with each group was as follows*

## Consent Seeking

The process for the day began with seeking informed consent. After a brief welcome, introduction of the research investigators and a warming up with songs, 'informed consent' was taken. A copy of the letter of consent<sup>2</sup> was given to every woman. It was read out and explained entirely. Consent for taking photographs, audio recording and video recording were also taken. The researchers explained that if any body from the group did not consent to audio-video documentation, it would not be done. They also explained that if anybody wished to withdraw from the group, they were free to do so now or at any stage during the day. Furthermore, the researchers explained to the participants that if they wish not to respond to some of the questions or not participate in some of the discussions, they were free to do so. As a token of willful and conscious consent the women were requested to write their names on paper badges in their own hand-writing and pin them onto their clothes. The women were free to ask any questions or seek clarifications in the beginning or at any time during the entire research.

## Administering the Questionnaire

The questionnaire<sup>3</sup> was the first tool that was administered to the group. Some women had to be helped with reading the statements and writing the remarks in the columns, although they were literate. The assistance was provided by the researchers.

## Case Stories and the FGDs

Five case stories, including questions for discussion with each of the stories had been prepared before hand. The groups were randomly divided into three sub- groups. Each sub- group was given one case story. The researchers decided which particular case story was to be given to which group. The researchers made sure that all five case stories were discussed among the four groups. The sub- groups first read out the case stories and then discussed each question. The groups were allowed to go back and forth on the sequence of the questions. One

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<sup>1</sup> Reasons given in ethical considerations; it is noteworthy that this deliberate separation of the caste groups was questioned by a *Dalit* woman herself.

<sup>2</sup> Appendix 5

<sup>3</sup> Appendix 2



woman from each sub- group took down notes of the discussion and presented them to the entire group. The researchers observed and noted down their discussions, facilitated wherever needed, and made sure that the women understood the questions. These discussions were also recorded on the audio tape as the group had consented to it. Some discussions were also video taped.

## Discussion on Needs and Rights

After lunch- break a discussion on needs and rights followed. Two strips of chart paper had the following statements written on them: “Gauri needs education” and “Gauri has a right to education”<sup>5</sup>. The groups were divided into two sub- groups and both sub- groups discussed the two statements. The discussions were guided by some questions. The researchers facilitated the FGDs, noted down and recorded the observations and discussions.

## Ranking of Rights and Freedoms and Juxtaposing them with Social Norms

A list of rights and freedoms<sup>4</sup> was written out in large bold letters on long strips of removable sticker paper. Each strip had one right or freedom written on it. After discussing among themselves, the women ranked the rights and freedoms according to their importance by sticking the strips in that order on a chart paper. S. No. 1 represented the most important right or freedom, and continuing as the rights or freedoms decreased in their importance. Finally, 10 represented the least important right or freedom. They also explained to the entire group why they had ranked the rights or freedoms in that particular order.

The researcher read out the list of social norms<sup>5</sup> and asked the group to choose one norm which they agreed with. Subsequently, the researcher facilitated discussions by asking the women which rights or freedoms and whose rights or freedoms would be violated against or compromised if one decided to adhere to the social norm.

## Vote of Thanks

The group- work for the day ended with a vote of thanks.

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<sup>4</sup> Appendix 4

<sup>5</sup> Appendix 3





# Awareness Of Rights And Human Rights

Women's awareness of rights was assessed on the basis of their ability to name and identify rights, right-holders, duty-holders and other stake-holders. A comparison of the village staff<sup>6</sup> and village women<sup>7</sup> was made in order to precisely identify the changes that took place after women associated actively with the women's organisation MASUM. The main tool used to assess this was the FGDs. The village women and the staff members discussed five case stories<sup>8</sup> which covered various thematic issues and their accompanying questions<sup>9</sup>.

## Naming and Identifying Rights

As opposed to the need- based approach, the rights based approach is dependent on the existence of specific rights. The ability to name and identify rights is of crucial importance since their inability to do so would incapacitate the women to claim their rights.

The village staff of MASUM were able to name and identify rights that were violated in the case stories more easily and precisely than the village women<sup>10</sup>. They were also able to spell out how violation of one right leads to violation of other rights. Most groups were able to identify rights that were denied on account of poor governance, e.g. the right to free health care by public health services to the story in which Sheela's husband is infected with HIV+/AIDS.

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<sup>6</sup> Sample 'b'

<sup>7</sup> Sample 'a'

<sup>8</sup> Appendix 1

<sup>9</sup> Appendix 1

<sup>10</sup> The awareness level among staff associated with credit-group activities was a little lower as compared to the other staff who had undergone intensive training and worked on issues of health, violence, education, children's issues and governance issues.

The village women, however, found it more difficult to name rights. The meaning of “rights” was interpreted by one of the groups as having a “right over a person or a thing”. The women did not seem to be familiar with ‘rights’ vocabulary. However, all of them were able to understand ‘injustice’ and could therefore suggest solutions, e.g. they felt that Drupada – the elected member of the *Gram Panchayat* - should be “helped” with her house work that would make it possible for her to attend the meetings. The village women were able to identify rights which are legally enforceable such as those regarding dowry, child marriage, maintenance of the wife and the right to share ownership in husband’s property. The latter could be the result of MASUM’s legal awareness campaigns on these issues. The village women seemed more familiar with marital rights and legal rights rather than women’s human rights.

The language of needs was more prevalent among the village women. Asha *needs* to cohabit with her husband, otherwise her sister will not find a good husband; Drupada *needs* to be a member of the *Gram Panchayat* so that she will learn, participate and conduct village affairs just the way men do; Sheela *needs* to have shared ownership in her husband’s property as this will help her out of her crisis; they also felt that if women want right in their natal property then they should also shoulder the responsibility of taking care of their parents. The needs based perspective may solve problems to some extent but it could be at the cost of rights and the women may not be able to claim these entitlements as rights.

Regarding Asha’s rights in the marital home, village women justified that she should have half the share in her husband’s property because she is an “*Ardhangini*”<sup>11</sup>, while the MASUM village staff felt that Asha should not only have a right in the marital property, but she should also have the right to choose where she wants to stay, even if it means living separate from her husband and in- laws.

Whereas the staff women use the language of rights and are able to name and identify rights, and manage to analyse right violations in a wider and more complex way, the village women predominantly use the language of needs and are not able to pinpoint rights. This means that the staff women have an advantage compared to other village women for claiming or asserting rights.

## Identifying Right-Holders, Duty-Holders and Other Stake-Holders

The need- based approach in development depends entirely on the generosity and charity of the donor; neither allowing the recipient to demand for whatever she needs, nor imposing a duty on the donor. The rights based approach uses specific rights and duties and clearly states who can claim the rights and who are responsible for fulfillment of the latter. If the women are able to identify right- holders, duty- holders and other stake holders then the foundation is laid for claiming their rights and also for holding the duty- holders to account. This is an important indicator of the development of the rights- based approach.

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<sup>11</sup> *her husband’s other half*



All the village women were easily able to identify the person whose rights were violated in the context of the different case stories. While village women were able to identify the obvious victim in the case stories, most of the staff were able to go beyond the obvious victim, e.g. Sheela's husband (AIDS patient), the rape victim in Drupada's case, other women who would be affected by Asha's decision to cohabit with her husband, etc.

The village staffs were also able to identify the right violators, e.g. Asha's parents, Munni's husband, Rani's husband, the public health system, powerful and influential people in the village, banks and credit groups etc. They pointed out that parents are "equally responsible for promoting violence" and equally at fault if they are not willing to take care of their daughters who are victims of domestic violence. Thus they are able to identify other stake-holders such as parents who can be held to account if they refuse to help their daughters.

One village women's group displayed a high level of awareness; not only did the women of this group remark about the *Sarpanch* (elected village head) in the case story about Drupada, who cannot exercise his rights because he is a *Dalit*, but they also believed that he will not be in a position to give justice to the rape victim even if he desires to do so. Only collective effort in the village will enable the *Sarpanch* to provide help.

We can therefore conclusively say that most women have the ability to identify right-holders, duty-holders and some other stake holders. Hence, most women possess the competence to hold the right person to account for neglecting, breaching or violating a duty that the stake-holder owes to another person. It would be essential to know whether the women are able to identify various forms of discrimination, inequalities and inequities that affect their lives.

## **Ability to Identify Areas of Discrimination and Inequality (Caste, Class, Gender)**

Many Indian cultures adhere to social structures which are inherently discriminatory against specific gender (mostly women), oppressed castes and classes. The beliefs are so strongly integrated into their lives that it is sometimes difficult to recognise the line between what can be accepted as culture and what is a clear violation of rights. It is therefore important that the women are able to separate the two spheres and to identify areas of discrimination and inequality. This ability is put to test here.

All village women are in a position to identify gender inequalities which becomes quite evident from their remarks on foetal sex determination, rights in natal and matrimonial properties, rights in political participation of women, the under-estimation of women's abilities, domination by men in decision making, controlling women, and in denying justice to a rape victim. Women of both groups are also able to identify caste inequalities. They are sensitive about pressure on the *Dalit Sarpanch* in Drupada's case. They regard the two-child norm that disqualifies people with more than two children from engaging in politics as being discriminatory, since the poorest and the least powerful from the marginalised castes are more likely to bear more children due to fear of high child mortality.



## Ability to Identify Instruments that Can be Used to Claim, Protect and Realise Rights and Access to Mechanisms for Obtaining Entitlements

An important factor in the process of claiming and asserting one's rights is the utilisation of legally enforceable instruments and mechanisms. In this section we are looking at the level of awareness among the women in relation to existence of specific legally-enforceable instruments and mechanisms.

All women are able to easily identify law as an instrument for claiming rights and for securing justice, though the village women are unable to pin-point legal remedies. They are aware of marital rights, property rights, laws against pre-natal sex- determination-tests, of bigamy being a crime, and laws against dowry. However, misconceptions regarding legal provisions are also prevalent among village women. For instance they believe that married Hindu men can marry again if the first wife gives written consent or that an estranged wife gets half of her husband's income as maintenance.

The village based staff are more sensitive and vocal to gender issues than other village women. They are able to look at law with 'gender perspective'. They are able to say that if Rani in the case story undergoes a sex-determination test, she should not be punished under law since she is equally a victim of gender discrimination<sup>12</sup>.

Both the village women as well as the village staff were skeptical about the outcome of a legal remedy. They feel that corruption, delays, financial costs as well as political interference deny justice and promote unjust outcomes, and therefore they question the purpose of law. Making law to work for the disempowered women or the disempowered community is the biggest challenge for them. One group of village women has commented that "a woman will be able to get justice only from other village women". They suggest that the *Mahila Mandal*<sup>13</sup> should be given the authority to punish, fine or even "beat" the offender.

However, the village staff are more optimistic and suggest other solutions to the lethargic and corrupt state machinery. The village staff clearly identify women's rights beyond mere family or marital rights. They hold the state responsible for providing health care to women and to other people. They talk of pressures on the government for proper implementation of schemes for vulnerable communities and for good public health services through the collective strength of women, and by 'mobilising other people and the local self-government.

The village staff are also aware of international instruments such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW ).

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<sup>12</sup> *She is forced by her in-law to go undertake test and is threatened with dire consequences if she gives birth to a daughter".*

<sup>13</sup> *Women's Collective*



# Perceptions About Rights

A questionnaire<sup>14</sup> was used as the main tool for assessing attitudes about rights in the context of existing social norms and behaviors. It was used with sample 'a' as well as with sample 'b'.

## Attitudes and Beliefs About Violence as a Human Rights Violation

### Domestic Violence as a Human- Right Violation

Domestic violence, especially in the form of physical violence is a very common phenomenon that occurs in most households of the village. It is largely accepted and often justified as being a 'masculine' behavior, inherent in all men. It is even accepted by women as a form of expressing 'love' and 'a sense of belongingness' to the husband and family , rather than being in 'possession' of the family. Women do not understand it as a tool of control over them. They in fact believe that they themselves are responsible for the beatings they get : 'they' make mistakes, 'they' provoke men and thus deserve violence.

This attitude is clearly reflected in table no. 1 where 41.5% of the village women<sup>15</sup> agreed with the statement that women are responsible for the beatings they get and another 6% are not sure. Women commented that she deserves to be beaten if the mistake she made is serious. Even those who did not agree with the above statement held the same attitude. Arguing that both are at fault but women get beaten while men don't and that women have no option but to " tolerate all criticism quietly" – an attitude that justifies violence. Some village women

even argued that a woman “should also have a right to beat her husband if he makes a mistake” and that this would constitute real “equality”. The whole debate among village women seems to centre on differential treatment for men as compared to women, rather than condemning violence or positing a life free of violence as a human right.

On the contrary, all village staff<sup>16</sup> disagrees with the statement that women are responsible for domestic violence. They go on to say that violence is used to maintain power and control over women. Many also do not believe that children need to be beaten to instill obedience. They consider a life free of violence as a fundamental human right.

However, one third of the village staff did agree with the statement “Children don’t obey unless they are beaten”. While some of them agreed that a patient explanation can make children obey. They also commented that beating may be used as the last resort. Although 61.6% women do not agree with the statement, the sample size is too low to state that our society believes in non-violence.

It may be concluded that in general, violence is accepted in order to solve problems, more so as a control mechanism for children. Although a significant number of village women oppose the use of violence, it does not seem that they regard it as a human right violation, whereas most of the village staff clearly state that it is one. It means that the staff members would find it much easier to assert their rights as they are aware of them.

### ***Rape as a Human Right Violation***

Rape is an extremely serious, widely prevalent form of violence against women. For a woman it is not only traumatic but also stigmatizing, especially in rural areas where it also becomes an issue for gossip. The victim’s “future” is in question and one of the solutions found is marriage to the rapist<sup>17</sup>. A statement that enquires into if women justify rape was given.

A majority (73.8%) of village women firmly disagreed with the statement that men rape because women provoke. However 9.3% did agree with the statement. A significant percentage- 16.9%- did not respond to the statement, but commented that rape is beyond their understanding, and one woman stated that only “half-mad” girls get raped. All the village staff rejected this statement, outright rejecting the notion that women provoke rape.

It may therefore be conclusively stated that the majority of women condemned rape. However a significant fraction of the village women blamed women for being raped and claimed that they usually provoke men. This shows that they do not see rape as a rights violation but rather as a consequence of behaving provocatively. The way to avoid rape was to behave in a manner that does not provoke men. The staff members clearly opposed this idea and regarded rape as a human rights violation. This could be a result of their close association with MASUM.

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<sup>16</sup> *Sample ‘b’*

<sup>17</sup> *discussed further below in this report*



# Putting an End to Violence

Options that women are likely to choose in their effort to stop violence were included in the questionnaire.

## Domestic Violence – A Private Affair?

Many societies embrace the belief that domestic violence should be hidden within home and that outsiders should not get to know of “family problems” as this may result in loss of status, pride and respect. The rights based approach holds those to account who have a duty to help victims of violence and to prosecute the offenders. The former are, however, mostly people from outside the family such as the police or neighbours. This section enquires into women’s attitudes towards the traditional belief of keeping problems within the four walls of home versus seeking help from outside.

Fifty two percent of the village women<sup>18</sup> believed that women should not speak to outsiders if they are beaten, but should ideally try to resolve the problem within the house<sup>19</sup>. However, many of them commented that this can prove to be dangerous and that if the problem does not get resolved, the women should seek MASUM’s help. Some of them only expressed their anxiety: “what if the problem does not get resolved in the house” and had no answers. One woman even stated that it is not worth telling others about the abuse as it can prove costly.

The norm and practice of keeping abuse and violence within the private sphere still continues to a large extent – out of shame and for the fear of losing status and a home. As we have seen in the analysis above, many women look at abuse as a form of deserved punishment and not as a rights violation, agreeing however that this punishment can become intolerable.

The MASUM village staff<sup>20</sup> totally disagree with this norm. They believe that since the perpetrators are the powerful family members themselves, this issue cannot be resolved within the house. They are optimistic and believe that at least a woman can get some safety if she talks to others and that she can take further measures to seek justice.

This section implies that nearly half of the village women would sacrifice the possibility of help from outside the home in order to save their family’s reputation and pride, while the staff members would not. The latter regard these norms and customs as obstructions to a woman in asserting her rights and thus they oppose them.

## Law as an Instrument for Protecting Rights

The police are supposed to be the gateway to seeking legal recourse after domestic

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<sup>18</sup> Sample ‘a’  
<sup>19</sup> Appendix 2, Table No. 4  
<sup>20</sup> Sample ‘b’

violence has occurred. Whether women look at this legal machinery as protecting them or protecting their rights to safety and peace is beyond the scope of this research, but whether women consider this option or not was investigated.

Eighty percent of the village women<sup>21</sup> feel that a daughter-in-law should seek police help if she experiences violence and 20% of them feel that she should not go to the police<sup>22</sup>. Even among these 20% many of them suggest that she should go to MASUM instead of the police, in the first instance. The comments of the majority on this statement inform us that these women strongly believe that a daughter-in-law who is abused should seek justice and regard police as the first step to legal recourse. They do believe that violence is unjust, but this belief seems to be based on the premise of it being an “intolerable” situation rather than a rights violation.<sup>23</sup>

A similar response is noticeable among the village staff<sup>24</sup> but they recognise violence as life threatening and consider attempts to negotiate at the village level as an option.

One staff member expressed her frustration about the use of police force.

“It is our experience that if the police intervene in cases of domestic violence, poor people fear law and bow down, but the rich are adamant. Not only will they challenge them but will also try to take revenge on women like Asha.<sup>25</sup>”

Conclusively, it may be said that, all women do in general believe in the police to seek legal recourse. However, they are aware of the problems that may be connected to alerting the police and therefore, prefer to go to other institutions such as MASUM where they can seek legal advice. This indicates that the police system itself is weak and corrupt, and also lacks accountability and independence.

### ***Should a Rapist Marry the Rape Victim?***

When a girl is raped it is often feared (by her and her family) that she will not be able to find a husband in future. This would entail staying with her natal family for her entire life. This is not only considered as an additional financial burden to her natal family but also leads to loss of pride and respect within the society. Thus, to “compensate” for the destruction of the raped woman’s future prospects, the victim’s parents often pressurise the rapist to marry her. Many courts regard marrying the victim as appropriate compensation and drop charges on the

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<sup>21</sup> Sample ‘a’

<sup>22</sup> Appendix 2, Table No. 5

<sup>23</sup> Hence, rather than the courts aiming at assertion of people’s rights, many such cases are withdrawn or compromised in court in return of financial compensation or even reconciliation.

<sup>24</sup> Sample ‘b’

<sup>25</sup> Refer to Case Story No 2



rapist's willingness to marry her. Not only does this practice damage the victim both emotionally and physically, it also indicates the common assumption that a woman is meant to sacrifice everything for the sake of marriage. In this section we enquire into women's attitude towards this practice.

The fear of stigma and of bad marriage prospects of a rape victim was observed among village women<sup>26</sup> from the responses they gave to the question whether a rapist should marry the victim<sup>27</sup>. Only 20% of the village women feel that the rapist should not marry his victim whereas the majority (72.3%) feels that the rapist should be compelled to marry the victim. The remaining 7.7% were not able to answer the question. It is interesting to note the comments that accompanied their responses. Some said that the rapist should marry only if he is unmarried, or if he does not have children from his previous marriage, or if he was "not in his senses" while raping. Anger was expressed about the rapist for ruining the woman's life. He should therefore, compensate the woman by means of marrying her and taking care of her for the rest of her life. This logic is based on the belief that a woman's entire life and future is ruined and that marriage is the only 'future' for a woman. Thus the actual traumatic experience of rape gets more or less discounted. Rape to most of the village women means stigma rather than a right violation.

The whole village staff<sup>28</sup> except for one disagreed with the "solution" of a victim being married off to the rapist. There were however no strong comments with this response. One of the women talked about the choice of marriage being with the rape victim and another one said that rape should not happen. Women who had been MASUM staff members had gone a long way to 'unlearn' strong beliefs and to understand why these practices cannot be justified. However, some grey areas still exist.

It seems that the village women consider it to be better for a woman to sacrifice her physical and emotional well-being in order to get married and not to fall into the socially stigmatised category of 'unmarried women'. Staff women reject this practice; however, it seems as if they are not entirely clear on which rights exactly will be violated.

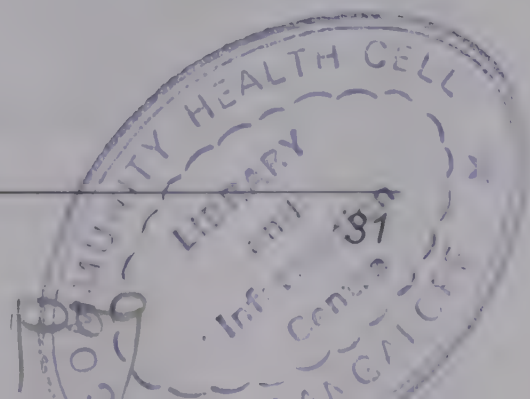
### ***"All Women Should be Home Before Dark" - A Protectionist Measure or a Rights Violation?***

It is believed that many incidents of rape happen during the dark. Due to lack of resources and irregularities in implementation of the law, it becomes difficult to find practical solutions for the enhancement of woman's safety at night. Thus women often find themselves forced to return home before dark in order to avoid sexual assault or harassment. As mentioned above, the consequences of rape are very severe for women in terms of social stigmatisation

<sup>26</sup> Sample 'a'

<sup>27</sup> Appendix 2, Table No. 6

<sup>28</sup> Sample 'b'





and ruining of marriage prospects. The women's natal families thus often demand that she comes home before dark to avoid being raped.

Eighty nine percent of the village women<sup>29</sup> felt that women should be home before dark<sup>30</sup>. They commented that it is not safe to be outside in the dark and that it is likely for women to be lured by 'bad social elements'. Being home before dark may indeed be the most practical and easy solution for ensuring safety, but it is a compromise on their freedom of movement, choice and opportunity, which women have to make. It is a submission to violent behaviors of men rather than questioning such behavior. Among the 9% who disagreed, comments were made which showed that these women were aware of the danger, but insisted on challenging violence by "training their daughters in self- defence".

None of the village staff<sup>31</sup> felt that women should be home before dark. It restricts their growth and development, as one staff member put it.

Whilst all women seem to realise that it is men who are at fault for rendering the village into an unsafe place after the dark, the staff members seem to understand the wider consequences of these restrictions on a woman's life and take a more challenging approach to the problem. The vast majority of village women remains submissive to aggressive male behaviour and does not challenge the status-quo for asserting their rights.

## **Child Marriages**

Marrying off daughters is often regarded as a big burden off the family's shoulders. Being worried about girls getting lured into sexual activity that would reduce their marriage prospects causing a financial burden to the natal family, girls are married off at a very young age. MASUM has been campaigning strongly against early marriages in the villages.

29% of the village women<sup>32</sup> agreed that 'daughters should be married early, or else they will get into sexual activities', while 63% did not agree with this statement<sup>33</sup>. Most of them understood 'early marriage' as child marriage and justified their disagreement with the girl's requirement of being physically and mentally mature. The latter might be a result of MASUM's incessant campaign. Their comments however suggested that women fear their daughters getting into sexual activities and they feel that such behavior can be prevented by keeping an eye on them and/or engaging them fully in household work, so that they can be married safely at the "right" age. Sexual rights of adolescents were alien to the village women, though there was awareness of health and reproductive rights to some extent (again due to MASUM's intervention in this area).

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*Sample 'a'*

*Appendix 2, Table No 7*

*Sample 'b'*

*Sample 'a'*

*Appendix 2, Table No. 7*



The whole village staff on the other hand disagreed with the statement. They regarded health and sexuality education as important elements of adolescent right and not early marriage or “keeping an eye” on daughters.

Despite the existence of laws against child marriage, it is widely prevalent. A possible explanation could lie in the fact that lesser dowry is required for very young bridegrooms and that financially independent women are still exceptional to become role models.

## Attitudes and Beliefs Towards the Right to Equal Treatment and Equal Rights

The data obtained from exercises on the case studies revealed that the women emphasised gender equality and were also able to identify discrimination. However, they tended to give preferences based on their understanding of expected gender roles, which is directly linked to their understanding of rights and entitlements.

### Equal Ownership Rights in the Matrimonial Home

The matrimonial house is regarded as a woman’s home, where husband and wife are expected to cohabit and where it is the husband’s duty to ‘maintain’ his wife as per law. The law does not give property rights to the wife but provides a right of residence. Since the woman leaves her natal home in-order to cohabit with her husband, she also loses possession of the natal home and has, therefore, remote chances of exercising any ownership rights over it (even when the law provided for it). The research therefore probed into whether women accepted the idea of ownership rights over natal and matrimonial property.

All village staff<sup>34</sup> and most village women<sup>35</sup> felt that women should be co-owners of the house and property alongside their husbands. Only one woman answered in the negative and 4.6% women did not respond. All proponents were clearly aware of property ownership as a right as they believed that the house belonged to both, husband and wife. This strong response also seems to be a result of MASUM’s campaign that not only advocated for ownership rights, but has been successful in legally registering over 9000 homes as joint property of husbands and wives.

Regarding ownership rights in a woman’s natal property, 76.9% of the village women agreed that they should be given “equal rights - either in the natal or matrimonial home”<sup>36</sup>. Some of them felt that although they may have the legal right, it is difficult to assert it, while some said that it should be left to an individual woman’s wish and her choice to ask for her share or to give it up. They added that if she wants her share as her right then she should also

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Sample ‘b’

Sample ‘a’

Appendix 2, Table No. 10

shoulder responsibility for taking care of her parents and perform other such duties - a physically impossible task. This is also the reason given by natal families for denying property rights to their daughters. Those who did not agree felt that if a wife has rights in the matrimonial property then it is not necessary for her to enjoy entitlements in natal property.

Ten out of eleven staff members<sup>37</sup> felt that women should have equal rights in natal property. Right of ownership of family property by women is a complex political issue that can challenge patriarchy and therefore brings about the resistance and ambiguous opinions. Overall, it seems that most women believe in women's ownership rights in the matrimonial house and natal house.

## ***Equal Wages***

Women are mostly expected to do housework or do menial jobs resulting in the women having in hand none or very small independent income. Many women whose rights have been abused by their husbands or families remain silent and stay with the latter as they do not see any solution for practical problems such as financing their lives outside the husband's or family's home. Thus, a key component of MASUM's work is of enabling the woman to be financially independent, so as to give her a real choice to escape violence and rights violations. However, women's earnings from work often are not substantial due to unequal wages for men and women. The issue discussed in this section was whether men and women should have a right to equal wages for equal jobs.

All village staff except for one and 84.6% village women agreed that women should get equal wages as men, while 7.7% did not<sup>38</sup>. Those who agreed expressed that equal wages were their right since the work men and women do was exactly the same. One of the opponents strongly believed that equal wages were impossible and she could not even imagine the idea.

The concept of a right to equal wages for equal work seems to be well pronounced among all women.

Political participation of women and affirmative action as a means to achieve equality

As opposed to the needs based approach which may not require political participation, the rights based approach regards the latter as being necessary for the empowerment of marginalised groups and as a platform to discuss and take decisions together.

The research enquired into their attitude towards women's political participation in the *Gram Panchayat*<sup>39</sup>.

Ninety one percent of the village women<sup>40</sup> agreed that there should be reservations

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<sup>37</sup> Sample 'b'

<sup>38</sup> Appendix 2, Table No. 11

<sup>39</sup> Village Governance System

<sup>40</sup> Sample 'a'



for women in the *Gram Panchayat*, while only 6.3% disagreed<sup>41</sup>. Those who agreed stated that a woman must enjoy equal rights as men do and be informed about political processes and happenings in the village. However, in response to another statement in the questionnaire<sup>42</sup>, 32.3% felt that politics is not a woman's cup of tea, mainly because women are ignorant about politics. However, all women, except for one, believed that there should be reservations for women in the *Gram Panchayat*. Some women commented that a woman is often dissuaded by her husband and in-laws from getting into politics and other women expressed that such participation will increase a woman's knowledge and will therefore empower her.

All village staff<sup>43</sup> completely believed in the idea of women's political participation.

Over all, the findings revealed that although women agree that reservations for women in the village *Gram Panchayat* are necessary, they feel that women are not sufficiently equipped for political participation. However, they should take the challenge as an opportunity to learn, get informed, express their opinions and thus become empowered.

## Contraception

Contraception is traditionally regarded as women's responsibility. The fact that men and women are equally involved and, thus, should take equal responsibility, is rarely taken into account. The research enquired about the women's opinion on responsibility of contraception.

Regarding the use of contraception by both men and women<sup>44</sup>, only 12.3% village women and one staff member felt that preferably women should use contraceptives rather than men. Some village women commented that although it is a matter of 'choice', it is women who believe that 'a small family is a happy family' and, hence, it should be her responsibility to use contraceptives and to prevent pregnancy. 61.6% village women who disagreed argued that since children belong to both, **both** should use contraceptives. 26.1% did not respond to the question and expressed that they did not know what contraceptives were or that they did not use any. There also seemed to be misconceptions of the utility of contraceptives among the village women: "The best way to avoid the birth of female children is by way of using the right type of contraception which guarantees a male child." This statement makes it evident that further sexuality education is needed.

## Education - Only for Boys?

It is common in rural societies to provide a number of "privileges", e.g. education, to boys rather than girls, as the former are considered the future bread-winners of the family. Girls

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*Appendix 2, Table No. 12*

*Appendix 2, Table No. 13*

*Sample 'b'*

*Appendix 2, Table No. 14*

are denied these rights as they will be married off into another family. The rights- based approach regards education as a right for every child - girl and boy.

A question enquired into whether the women thought only boys should be educated.<sup>45</sup> 24.6% of the village women<sup>46</sup> agreed with the statement, of which 6 women felt that boys are inherently more intelligent than girls. They preferred to provide more education to boys because the daughter's future would be marriage and her future home is with the husband's family. Therefore, they would rather educate their sons – so that the asset remains in the family. However, 72.3% did not believe that boys deserve more education than girls. For girls to become empowered and self- reliant, the women reasoned that, girls should enjoy equal rights in education. One village woman lamented the fact that she was an uneducated widow and could not do anything else but farming. She insisted on education for girls. Other village women explained that educated women are more likely to enjoy their rights as they are able to apply for jobs and to have their say in *Gram Panchayat* meetings; “education never gets wasted”, they said. Even among 72.3%, who believed that boys and girls should be educated, 7 women felt that boys are more intelligent than girls.

The village staff however, was very clear on this issue and believed in the intelligence of both, boys and girls and also in equal rights to education. They were aware that opportunities provided to girls make them more or less educated, rather than intelligence.

While some staff women opined that education and empowerment were also a matter of a woman starting to live for herself, rather than always “living for others”. Others said that the money that women earn would be “all extracted by the family anyway”, so nothing would be left for her.

A staff member explained that whether educated or not, a woman is trapped in a catch-22 situation and will always remain “confined to the kitchen”. Another staff woman also critiqued the status-quo of society and its attitude towards education for girls: “I know of a boy who is encouraged to go to school even though he failed in standard 9, while his sister who passed standard 10 was forced to discontinue further studies.”

They also expressed criticism about the current education system: “our education system itself does not guarantee a right to education. We have to pay high fees for higher education and, therefore, education is obviously not meant to be for the poor.” Even within primary education the staff women consider that inequality exists there, as all private schools or “schools for the rich” are qualitatively far better than the state schools- the ones “for the poor”.

It may be concluded that the vast majority of women believe in girl's right to education and understand the consequences that education or the lack of it may have on her life.

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<sup>45</sup> Appendix 2, Table No 15

<sup>46</sup> Sample 'a'



# Attitudes Towards the Universality of Human Rights

## Bigamy as a Last Resort

Bigamy is not uncommon in villages. Men often marry manifold especially if the first wife does not bear boys or any children at all. A question enquired as to what extent women agreed to such bigamous marriages and approved of such privileges to men.

Forty five percent of the village women agreed with the statement that men could re- marry if their first wife did not bear any children<sup>47</sup>. The proponents argued that bigamy should only be allowed if the first wife gives consent and that it was the only practical strategy to ensure progeny. However, they believed that the husband “should give his wife her rightful claims”.

Fifty one percent of the village women strongly opposed bigamy because they felt that it was unjust, as a woman’s inability to bear a child could in reality be a result of the man’s infertility. Furthermore, there had been medical proof that women were not responsible for the sex of the child.

Bigamy is punishable under the Hindu Law. However, this is not fully acceptable for many village women and they are willing to compromise their marital rights and dignity for the sake of continuing the family lineage. Heavy patriarchal influences have inculcated strong beliefs, which are hard to be broken or changed.

The village staff<sup>48</sup> all showed a very clear stand against bigamous marriages.

Whilst MASUM staff members were unanimously against bigamy, a significant number of village women supported bigamous marriages as a solution to a child-less marriage.

## Opinions About Some Rights Which Challenge Social Norms

### Right to Choose One’s Partner

It is very common that parents arrange marriages for their children. Whereas the man still has the option to reject the proposal, the woman cannot do so and is forced to agree to marry whomever her parents have chosen.

The research enquired about the women’s opinion on whether a woman should have the right to choose her partner. Almost all village women<sup>49</sup> agreed that women should be given the right to choose their husbands, mainly for two reasons: she has to spend her life with him

<sup>47</sup> Appendix 2, Table No 16  
<sup>48</sup> Sample ‘b’  
<sup>49</sup> Sample ‘a’

and she should have the same right to make the choice as a man does. Some remarked that in case women choose a partner, they should take their parents' consent. In practice, although many claim that their daughters were given the choice, it is just an eye-wash – they are made to agree due to parental and family pressures<sup>50</sup>. Here again we find that although principally most women agreed with the concept of a right to choose a partner, it yet remains a challenge to social norms. Moreover, their remarks on a woman being doomed to spend her entire life with her husband in all circumstances, have a sub- tone of a no- choice situation once they are married.

Among the village staff<sup>51</sup> 75% agreed with a woman's right to choose her partner, while 25% disagreed. Those who disagreed did so because they said that it does not happen in reality. Young women had begun to assert this right in the villages, they said, and 'love' marriages are on the rise, in spite of resistance.

Although most women resisted the customary practice of arranging marriages, they all seemed to be aware that in reality this tradition continues to exist. This could indicate that challenging social norms on this issue remains problematic for them.

### ***Giving and Receiving Dowry***

Dowry is very commonly paid to the boy's family by the girl's family at the wedding. It has been one of the major causes of murder and other forms of violence against women. The daughter is reduced to a mere pawn, valued in terms of money: "If you are concerned about your daughter and want a good husband who brings sufficient income and treats her well, you will pay a dowry as per demand". A daughter thus becomes a financial burden for her parents and her birth is not welcome. Laws against dowry and laws for the prevention of dowry deaths have been enforced, public education is carried out on various fronts and awareness drives against practice of dowry are going on. Yet this practice continues.

All women's responses to whether dowry should be provided and received were in the negative. The conviction of their responses was challenged by asking whether dowry, if given willingly can be accepted.

Sixty two percent of the village women agreed that if dowry is given willingly it must be accepted, and 30.8% disagreed<sup>52</sup>. 7.7% did not respond. Those who agreed justified their views by claiming that the money would contribute to their household, and claimed that dowry is often forced upon them too, even if they do not want, and sometimes it is given because the parents simply can afford it. "Accepting dowry is wrong and dowry must be abolished" are the comments of those who disagreed. They seem to take a very clear stand, though they may not use the language of rights.

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<sup>50</sup> Appendix 2, Table No. 17

<sup>51</sup> Sample 'b'

<sup>52</sup> Appendix 2, Table No. 18



84% of the women staff firmly believed that dowry was wrong, interestingly, 16% of the village staff were ambiguous. One of them mentioned that if dowry is given it should be in the daughter's name and only then it is acceptable.

The above statement is addressed to the dowry receivers. Another statement that addresses dowry providers was given, to further enquire about the option of giving dowry. 29% of the village women felt that if the boy's family refuses dowry, "something must be wrong with the boy". Another woman held that a man would refuse dowry only to show that he is not really interested in the girl, i.e. a form of protest. Others who disagreed attributed non-acceptance of dowry to true love or being genuine, or that the boy is "financially independent enough that he does not need the dowry money".

None of the village staff agreed with the statement that it is alright to give dowry.

Overall, the village women do not seem to be clearly against the custom of providing or receiving dowry. Dowry is regarded as a need and a matter of choice rather than a rights violation.

## On State Accountability

State accountability is a concept whereby the three bodies of the state (legislative, executive and judiciary) and these with delegated state powers are obliged to fulfill certain duties and can be held responsible for disregarding, neglecting or breaching their duties. It is worth mentioning that India ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993 and therefore has a direct contractual obligation to the UN to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. Thus, where a woman is being discriminated against and state actors contribute to, disregard or neglect the case, the latter can be held to account as they are in breach of their duty.

The women were asked about their opinion on state accountability.

The concept of state obligation and accountability to ensure human rights to all was more pronounced among the village staff<sup>53</sup>. All of them expected and demanded neither charities nor private trusts to provide health services but that public hospitals and health care centers (PHCs) should be governed through the *Gram Panchayat*.

"The *Mahila Mandal* should make demands to the *Gram Panchayat* for a government-run hospital in the village. The *Mahila Mandal* will also have to follow-up with the *Gram Panchayat* to ensure that their demand is given attention and is fulfilled."

On the other hand, 78.4% of the village women expected such health care services to be provided by NGOs like MASUM. One of them even said that it was with such expectations

that they were participating in the research. The women trust the *Sadaphulis*<sup>54</sup> and go to public hospitals only on their advice. Only 10.8% said that public hospitals had to provide good health care services and did not expect MASUM to do so.

Receiving health services at their door-step is convenient and they are generally more affordable, so they felt. Their responses indicated, however, that they did not demand a PHC as part of their “right to free health care”.

MASUM has conducted awareness on state accountability for providing health care and some women have participated in such advocacy work.

Whereas all staff members seem to understand the concept and importance of state accountability, village women seem to confuse state obligations with those of other stake holders.

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<sup>54</sup> *MASUM Health Worker*



## Chapter 6

# *Problem - Solving And The Use Of Rights - Based Strategies*

Five case stories<sup>55</sup> that suggested varied problem solving strategies, including possible options and methods were discussed among the groups to enunciate responses.

Whether the use of the rights- based approach is effective is made visible through the choices and preferences the women make when facing rights violations and when they go against unjust social norms and assert their rights. In the following sub- section we enquire into the choices and preferences women make.

There is a stark difference in the preferences and the reasoning the two groups made for resolving issues of rights-violation, discrimination and inequality or taking steps towards rights protection.

The village staff<sup>56</sup> used the language of empowerment and social justice, while village women<sup>57</sup> remained submissive to social & family pressures and norms. For instance, the village staff suggested that Asha<sup>58</sup> should initially try to sort out the matter with family members, but make her own decisions, take measures to be economically self-reliant and also

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<sup>55</sup> *Appendix 1*

<sup>56</sup> *Sample 'b'*

<sup>57</sup> *Sample 'a'*

<sup>58</sup> *Appendix 1, Case Story No. 2 (Asha)*

legal measures for asserting her rights. On the other hand, the village women felt that, in order not to “affect her sister’s marriage prospects” she should try to reconcile with her husband with the help of MASUM. They furthermore believed that Asha’s in-laws should “treat Asha like their daughter and forgive any mistakes that she may have made.” The staff members opposed this opinion saying that Asha’s decision to leave the matrimonial home will in fact be beneficial for her sister, as this will give her prospective in-laws the message that “violence will not be tolerated.”

Although the village women also regarded dowry demands (in Asha’s case) as being discriminatory and unjust, they were willing to compromise if the dowry demand was withdrawn just so that her sister would find a suitable match. Such preferences lead to further disempowerment and subordination and thus become counter-productive to rights promotion.

The village staff preferred to mobilise a support system that would offer Asha support to bear the cost of breaking conventional social norms, and to work towards her empowerment. The village women on the other hand sought solutions that gave back the woman the status of a married woman through co-habitation and believed that this was the only solution to her problem. Thus we find that while usually staff prefers to challenge the structure, the village women prefer to adhere to the existing structure while pleading for “better” treatment to women.

As far as accessing law was concerned, the village staff expected a legal outcome that would help Asha (in the case story) to survive and live. They held: “It is only because there is law that women are at least able to survive, because law poses a threat to violent men”. However, the village women expected the legal outcome to enhance their bargaining power so that Asha would be able to live in the marital home without violence, but they were not so much concerned about Asha’s choice of continuing in the marriage.

The village staff preferred to offer emotional support to Munni<sup>59</sup> that reassures her that she “is not at fault”. Their goal was to help Munni to develop the courage to talk about her gynecological problem to her husband, as they believed that dialogue between married couples could “resolve such problems”. The village women preferred to warn her about the possible consequences of not talking to her husband, i.e. divorce, which is far more threatening, inculcating a fear of losing something more. They further commented that it is the husband’s right to know. The village women were more concerned about the duties of a ‘wife’ rather than her right to enjoy good health and health care.

All the respondents of the village did give priority to health care and self-care, and were sensitive towards Munni’s physical and emotional pain; however the village women suggested that she should get “permission” of her husband for undergoing the treatment: “The husband’s signature is required for everything and therefore you better get his permission”.

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<sup>59</sup> *Appendix 1, Case Story No. 5 (Munni)*



While the village women talk of “permission” the village staff talks of promoting dialogue, sharing and co-operation.

Here is the life story of Mala, (name changed) a staff of MASUM whose total acceptance of the rights-based approach empowered her to challenge the decision-makers in her family in an attempt to break an unjust social norm of “child marriage”. She courageously faced the consequences about which she was well aware and emerged successful.

## **Mala Narrates Her Experience**

“My life as a married woman has been no different from other women. Mine is a nomadic tribal family with strong ties with the joint family. I too was beaten and verbally abused over petty matters of house work by my husband and in-laws. It was 5 years ago that I joined the MASUM team as a Para-legal worker. As it fetched some income, my family did not put up much resistance to this decision. I learnt about women, their status and the politics of patriarchy. Every bit of what was discussed at MASUM’s training sessions, sharing sessions and discussions was exactly what I was experiencing - but began to understand the root cause of all this injustice. By nature, I get angry very easily and find it very difficult to hold my tongue, due to which I had suffered a lot of beatings. However, as my association with MASUM continued, I learnt to be more assertive and more courageous. I took it on me not to continue to be a victim myself but also to assert that I do not witness victimisation of any other woman quietly. The most daring thing I did was to stop the child marriage of my niece with the help of my MASUM friends. I had to face the wrath of my entire family, especially my husband. I faced all the music - the threats and the thrashing, but I held on to my stand. My firmness melted the anger of my husband who settled down at saying that Mala is right in her thinking but she should not have taken action against the family and their decision”. Ever since, life has changed for me. It is now 1 1/2 years that I have not received a thrashing. My assertion and belief in myself, the support of MASUM team and my conviction to stop injustice and uphold women’s rights has brought a change in my life.”

Mala’s courage to challenge social norms, assert her rights, express her opinion, take action and hold the family accountable came from a clear understanding of rights and her strong belief in them. It has made her own and other women’s lives happier. Mala ended by saying that “I will continue to work against blind beliefs. I have stopped observing fasts or sitting aside during menstrual periods or worshipping God. I will show the community that one can change for the better”.

## **Women’s Participation – Obstacles and Solutions**

### ***Political Participation***

As explained above, women’s political participation plays an important role in the concept of rights-based approach. However, it has been difficult for women to fulfill their



traditional duties at home and commit themselves to activities of the *Gram Panchayat*. For this reason, husbands and families are often against women's political engagement. Many a times it is observed that a husband or a male member represents a woman *Gram Panchayat* member in all meetings and discussions whereby she remains only a passive signatory.

The section below discusses women's opinion on solutions that would enable women to participate in the politics of the village. The discussions revolved around the case story of Drupada.

The village staff<sup>60</sup> suggested options which seem quite practical and balanced. They empathized with Drupada<sup>61</sup>, the elected member of the *Gram Panchayat*, for instance, believing that because she had never had the opportunity to participate in *Gram Panchayat* meetings, she had not been skilled enough to put across the *Dalit* girl's case of sexual harassment. Expressing one's opinion in a male dominated environment requires courage, the staff held. However, they would not "pity" Drupada but would remind her of her duty as an elected member and that she could be held to account by any citizen – even by the *Dalit* girl. They suggested that Drupada be backed by the village *Mahila Mandal*, which would help not only in claiming the rights of the *Dalit* girl, but also Drupada's rights as an active *Gram Panchayat* member. The village staff seemed to be able to apply the rights-based approach for bringing about change.

The village women<sup>62</sup> attributed Drupada's constraints in exercising her rights as a *Gram Panchayat* member to her ignorance and suggested that she overcame her ignorance. They did not talk about her duties towards society as an elected *Gram Panchayat* member but believed in the support of the *Mahila Mandal* to back her as well as the new *Dalit Sarpanch*. They were also aware of Drupada's and the new *Sarpanch*'s lack of power as a woman and as a *Dalit* respectively. Some considered that not providing the appropriate support to Drupada in her house hold jobs was a rights-violation, since this would lead to her not being able to attend the *Gram Panchayat* meetings.

In general, the discussion on Drupada's case story clearly indicated that the village women are a small step behind the village staff in using the rights-based approach about women's political participation.

### ***Women's Participation in Family Decision Making : The Real Life Story of Suma***

MASUM always and very consciously has used the strategy of participation of the most marginalized, especially women, when designing as well as implementing its activities. The participation of women in MASUM's programmes has been active, free and wilful. This has contributed to the creation of a sense of ownership over the programmes and a sense of

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<sup>60</sup> Sample 'b'

<sup>61</sup> Appendix 1, Ccase Story No. 1 (Drupada)

<sup>62</sup> Sample 'a'



responsibility for dealing with issues of discrimination and rights violation. The belief in human rights for human living arises not just out of knowing rights but also by experiencing them.

Suma, a village staff member of MASUM narrates her experience of how her life changed for the better but “you can’t eat the cake and still have it” She further narrates, I was born and brought up in a very protective family. My parents pampered me and I was never short of any material things, love and attention. As the custom goes, after I completed high school, my marriage was arranged with this man who owned a reasonable amount of land on which the family made a living.

After marriage I realised that my husband was a ‘lazy’ man who did not take on his bit of work in the farms. My in-law expressed their disgust but brought out their frustration on me. I was the target of all his misgivings and was humiliated time and again especially when it came to money matters. To add to my miseries, I became a mother of three daughters - no sons!

It was then that I took up the challenge to raise my three daughters and decided to do something for an income. The tensions had begun to affect my health, as headaches, joint pains etc. I used to weep bitterly over my helplessness.

One day, I heard that MASUM was looking out for health workers and since I was educated I was eligible. I decided to join and my family agreed as it would bring them money.

I had pent-up all disappointment of anger. I found a space in MASUM to share. Every sharing was a tearful experience and realisation for me. However I learnt that unless I take up the responsibility to change nothing will change. It is now nine years since I joined MASUM. I began to assert myself on my home-front and began taking decisions regarding farming, the crop, and house that is our share of property although nowhere was I a signatory. People found me more reliable than my husband. I continue to openly disagree with my mother-in-law and my husband as I know that what I say is the truth and nothing can change it and that it should not be rejected because I (as a woman) am saying it. I learnt to assert and this has made me take the most rational practical decisions that have brought some financial stability to the household. I am now the head of the family”.

But I have to pay the price through a backlash. Even today my husband opposes me and blames me for almost everything. I know it is his ego that is hurting but he says that I do not respect him. He is annoyed with everything I do or say. Now, after 22 years of marriage, he has stopped talking to me. It hurts, but my next challenge is not to give up and accept the reality that I am an intelligent and responsible decision maker as well as a bread-winner of the family. She ended tearfully.

## **Women’s Right to Self- Determination**

The rights- based approach envisages a woman’s right over her own body, both physical and mental, as a crucial key to empowerment. The woman herself ought to be the one to decide



about what will and what will not be done to her body. The women discussed a woman's right to self-determination with reference to the case story of Rani<sup>63</sup>.

In this case story, the staff<sup>64</sup> argued that Rani had the right over her own body and, therefore, the right to make her own decisions over it. Rani's husband should not be a *Sarpanch* at the cost of Rani's health. They also questioned the credibility of Rani's husband as a *Sarpanch* and his ability to "provide help to the village people".

The village staff strongly opposed the idea of sex determination inspite of knowing prevailing customs.

A son is considered as "the light of the family", somebody who will carry on the name of the family to the next generation. For the sake of the family name a girl's life is often sacrificed. How long can this go on? Sex determination is now considered an offence under law, but families, the villagers and the medical professionals are all working hand-in-hand when it comes to sex selective abortions and so the practice continues." They also argued that Rani has the right over her own body and therefore a right to take decisions about herself.

According to the staff women, it was especially the rich - the ones to make decisions in the villages and to be in charge of political power- who knew ways of "escaping legal implications" for foetal sex determination. They remarked that a lot of money is spent on abortions of female fetuses. Women's lives are endangered and often the women are forced to perform their duties in the household immediately after the abortion, causing more harm. They explained that a woman is made to believe that she is "at fault for bearing a female fetus."

The village women<sup>65</sup> suggested more prescriptive solutions than the staff members: while some argued that an abortion is a sin, others stated that they would be "terribly scared" if they were in Rani's place and suggested to undergo the sex-determination test and abort in case the fetus is a girl. The latter group of women also mentioned that if Rani decided against an abortion then her husband would probably desert her and Rani would have to legally seek maintenance. They also justify bigamy as a solution to 'not being able to give birth to a boy', although they seemed to be aware that neither Rani nor her husband were responsible for the gender of the fetus. At no point did the village women talk about Rani's right to make her own decisions.

Both the village women as well as the village staff suggested idealistic solutions to problems, e.g. both, Rani and her husband should make decisions together and Rani's health should be given priority over her husband's status, or Rani should convince the husband to cooperate with her. They also proposed that Sheela should start a business which would provide for her financially. In reality, it is the denial of exactly the options which the women mentioned

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<sup>63</sup> Appendix 1, Case Story No. 4

<sup>64</sup> Sample 'b'

<sup>65</sup> Sample 'a'



that has caused the denial of human rights. Women continue to compromise such rights to ensure that social position and shelter are not denied.

“If a woman goes against the opinion of the family members to claim her right to abortion, she will have to give up the home, in which case she will lose shelter and status. If the house was in her name, things would be different as it would be her right to stay in the house.”<sup>66</sup>

The village staff commented that education provided women with the necessary strength to speak up:

“If I wasn’t educated, I think I would have come quietly to my parents place like in the case story of Asha. But now that I know that laws such as 498A can protect me, I will try to use them. I will also try to seek help of the police, the NGO, the *Sarpanch* or anybody who I know will support me. I will decide to stay in my natal home but be financially self-reliant if my husband’s family does not accept my condition of withdrawing dowry demands.”

The village women on the other hand, seemed more skeptical and remarked that they had witnessed girls who had done their D.Ed<sup>67</sup> being beaten and driven into silence through violence and insults.

All in all, the idea of a woman’s right to self- determination is well pronounced among the women. However, considering a woman’s current position within their societies the fulfillment of this right seems unrealistic to them.

### ***Women’s Right to Self-Determination : The Life Story of Tara***

Tara, a woman of the Balutedar community, joined the MASUM team to earn an income from the handloom unit. She was trained as a *Sadaphuli*. ( health worker) The training built up her confidence and as women from all castes began to come to her, her self-esteem and sense of responsibility further rose.

She learnt several tactics for persuasion, reasoning out with women, motivating them to take self- care and more importantly in communication skills. It is with these skills and confidence that she has been able to deal with her alcoholic husband. She learnt to negotiate and this made their marital relationship more equal: “we now make decisions together most of the time”.

She was also able to resist the family belief that the mother- in- law’s possession by the goddess has to be passed on to the daughter-in-law. The next challenge was to marry her daughter only after she finished her education and not to give or to take dowry. **“It is a struggle all the time, if one believes in progressive thoughts”**, she lamented.

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<sup>66</sup> As stated by the village women (Sample ‘a’)

<sup>67</sup> Diploma in Education

### ***The Struggle for those with Progressive Thoughts***

*During a discussion with all the staff members<sup>68</sup>, the team gave several examples of back-lash experiences. The most common experiences were within the families, who tried to dissuade the women from continuing with the MASUM team. Further experiences were as follows: people trying to break women's support groups at the village level, political threats, non-cooperation of the police, people questioning the genuine nature of MASUM's work, people claiming that the women work with MASUM merely for financial reasons, people holding them accountable for the atrocities that occur in the villages<sup>69</sup>, and people placing responsibility on the MASUM staff for safety of the community. The latter is currently the biggest challenge for MASUM.*

Most women are expected to compromise some of their rights in order to conform to social norms and customs. It is therefore important to find out which rights and freedoms they regard as non negotiable and which ones they are willing to compromise.

The women were asked to rank rights according to their importance. While some of the compromises they made had already been mentioned in the discussions earlier this exercise enabled us to get a direct picture of how they perceived the significance of these rights.

When a set of 10 rights (mostly human rights) and freedoms<sup>70</sup> was given to the women, they felt that all rights were important but, gave the "right to life and the right to food" the highest ranks. Freedom of choice and mobility were, on the contrary, given least importance. Right to housing came in the third place, followed by right to safety, education, work/ earn and equal treatment. Finally, right to dignity had a varied response from rank 1 to rank 9.

Through the discussions, there was a realisation that all rights were equally important. One group of women even gave identical ranks to a set of two-three rights. The women also recognised that ranking is dependant on particular context, and since the socio economic context altered from group to group, the ranking also changed. They expressed that the rights which had been discussed were inter-dependent and, thus, it was difficult to rank them. The village women<sup>71</sup> remarked that, "you will only be able to enjoy your rights if you live; hence, the right to live is most important. Living, however, entails dignity and being respected. Life requires fulfillment of the basic right to food and for that you will have to be able to earn money. In order to earn money you need to be educated, thus, the right to education is also important. In order to live like humans you will require the right to security and housing, too. So how do we prioritize rights?"

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<sup>68</sup> Sample 'c'

<sup>69</sup> in the sense that the women should be able to stop the atrocities from happening

<sup>70</sup> Appendix 4

<sup>71</sup> Sample 'a'



The women worked in small groups of threes and fours for this exercise. Yet the groups had to be further split up in three cases because they were not able to come to a consensus in ranking.

The ranking shows that all women believed in the importance of rights and considered existence of a woman to be of highest value. They argued that a woman would be able to enjoy other rights only if she lived. Four groups that gave higher ranks to right to dignity argued that the right to dignity would determine her existence and all other rights followed thereafter. There was no stark difference between the ranking patterns of the village staff and the village women – indicating that theoretically, there is a similarity in thought. In practice however, the village women tend to submit to social pressure and conform to conventional and unjust social norms. On the other hand the village staffs were more aware of the gender and caste politics of power and control. They lamented that the realisation of some rights and freedoms (such as that of a woman’s freedom of expression) did not seem feasible to them, since a woman was usually not even granted permission to express her opinion in her natal home. Other rights such as children’s right to education were easier to fulfill: “The child-centered activity ‘*Ranpakhre*’ has made children aware of child rights; they have also searched for drop-out children and brought them back to school – such is the strength of understanding ‘rights’” they reported.

## The Relationship and Conflict Between Rights and Social Norms

The researchers conducted an exercise to explore whether the women were able to relate violation or enjoyment of rights to social norms. These rights were juxtaposed against certain existing social norms, especially those which they were forced to submit to in their day-to-day life<sup>72</sup>.

It was found that women were able to identify rights that they had to give up for “something more important”, e.g. girls/women being expected to come home before dark to ensure their safety, Hence their right to education, mobility, free choice and opportunity to development had to be compromised for the sake of safety. Although most groups did not principally agree with the norm that girls could not attend school/ college if they had to come home after dark”, they were forced to conform to this norm due to unsafe social reality. They felt that “this was unfair”.

All four groups of village women<sup>73</sup> felt that reservations in education based on caste should be abolished. The two groups of village women belonging to the open category<sup>74</sup> felt that it was unjust for the really intelligent students to be denied entry to school due to reserved

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<sup>72</sup> Appendix 3  
<sup>73</sup> Sample ‘a’  
<sup>74</sup> Brahmins / Marathas

seats. The two groups of village women who belonged to the marginalised castes also<sup>75</sup> believed that such reservations promoted inequality, because the reservation policy was being partial to them. On the other hand, all the village staff<sup>76</sup> was convinced that the reservation policy was a tool that would promote equality in a society that had been breeding inequality.

Both categories of women are aware of the existing caste and gender based discrimination which came out clearly while discussing Drupada's story. There was an enlightened response from the village staff on the issue of reservation. This is a result of their understanding of the rights-based approach, which they said had provided the necessary support for them to demand special measures, which would not compensate for the denial of certain rights. The village staff understood and believed in substantive equality and positive discrimination for achieving equal results.

Thus, we find that although all women were able to identify rights that were denied or violated due to existing social norms, the responses of the two groups were different. While village women felt that they were forced to submit to certain norms due to social circumstances, the MASUM village staff was clearly supportive of taking special measures and providing special privileges to those who are discriminated against.

## Needs and Rights

Women's understanding of fundamental differences between needs and rights is an important factor in strategising for social intervention.

In order to document this understanding, the women went through an exercise of comparing the two concepts by discussing the following two statements: 1. "Gauri needs education", 2. "Gauri has right to education". Spontaneous responses as well as these given to guided questions were noted.

The village staff<sup>77</sup> referred to possible benefits resulting from Gauri's education. In reference to statement no. 1 ("need") they thought that Gauri would be able to get education up to a level that she or her family felt was necessary. However, they referred to her right to education as being a fundamental right which was justiciable if Gauri was deprived of it. They referred to gender inequality in education opportunities and felt that society would be collectively responsible if Gauri was not educated. "There is no excuse and nobody should ask 'why should Gauri be educated?', they commented. They clearly understood that rights cannot be questioned, they are inalienable and they are nobody can decide about "giving or not giving" rights.

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<sup>75</sup> *Balutedars / Dalits*

<sup>76</sup> *Sample 'b'*

<sup>77</sup> *Sample 'b'*



The village women<sup>78</sup>, gave somewhat similar responses. They also talked about providing special assistance to Gauri if she could not afford schooling, but a lot would depend on her parent's choices, they remarked. The village women added that "if Gauri is clever, she must rightfully receive higher education" and then rightfully get employed.

An interesting comment made by the village women indicated other motives for educating women: "If Gauri is educated she will stand greater chances of marrying a better educated husband." The staff women, too, made a similar statement: "nowadays, if a woman is educated she gains more respect than an uneducated one. She is also able to marry a well- educated husband". Thus, some women did not regard fulfillment of an inalienable right as the motive for educating women, but the enhancement of prospects of finding a good husband.

The village women talked about having the right to make a choice in seeking higher education. Most of them did mention that the state was responsible for providing schools, books, hostels etc. They held parents, families and communities accountable for denial of education. Girls are considered as burdens and the only way to relieve the burden is to get her married early – may be after a minimum level of education. If the girl is allowed to seek as much education as she wants there are chances that she gets lured into a love affair, she can get cheated and can be stigmatised for life. Hence parents, in order to preserve the family honour, prefer not to take the risk. Now-a-days, because of law they wait and get her married as soon as she turns 18". They explained, "Hence, Gauri is not able to enjoy education as a right even today".

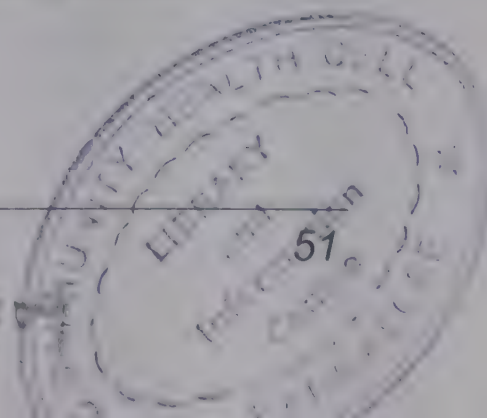
It can be concluded that women of both groups did not find it difficult to distinguish between needs and rights; both groups talked of "needs are begged for" and "rights are demanded and enjoyed."

The village staff had a better vocabulary than the village women, this being necessary tool to carry forward the rights-based approach. The staff talked about the right to education even beyond the fundamental right to education and being inalienable and universal, while they agreed on the parental duty to provide education, they primarily held the state accountable for providing the opportunity to benefit from education and to receive education. They also expressed discontent about the privatisation of education, high and rising costs of education, and poor facilities in villages, poor transport facilities that affected both boys and girls and lack of safety for women – for which they held the state completely accountable.

As this exercise was conducted towards the latter part of the day, after FGD presentations by different sub-groups in relation to case stories, there was more clarity about the concept of rights among the women. However, this may have also influenced their opinions and could be regarded as a limitation to the validity of the answers to this question.

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<sup>78</sup> Sample 'a'





## Acceptance of the Rights Based Approach

The women's motivation to use the concept of rights for the elimination of discrimination and inequality, and for problem-solving was assessed in this section. Referring back to the FGD exercises on the case stories, women's responses to the question "what they would you do if you were in the place of the person being discriminated/ violated against" were analyzed below.

Knowing about rights does not necessarily lead to the ability to use them. It takes individual courage and collective consciousness for a woman to be able to take action to claim, assert, protect and enjoy rights when she is denied these rights or when her rights are violated.

The first and foremost response of the village staff<sup>79</sup> was that they would seek the help and support of people who believed, respected and supported their decisions. They further remarked that it was their right to receive support and that if they were denied help they would demand an explanation. They felt that increasing their knowledge about issues connected to their problems, e.g. gathering information on HIV/AIDS and enquiring into facts about sexual harassment of the *Dalit* girl, were the first steps to asserting their rights. This would help to present a strong case before the people that she would expect support and help from. Some also claimed that they would take challenges to break unjust social norms, make their own decisions and set examples to other women: "I would be a role model to most women who fall prey to social pressures and keep tolerating violence. I would set a live example that a woman can be independent and happy if she decides not to go back to her violent in-law."

The staff members were ready to discuss domestic violence with their husbands (here: the perpetrator), but would not tolerate it. They attributed their fearlessness to MASUM's trainings. They had all experienced strength in collectivity, they said. One group stated that they felt confident and motivated to take a rights-based stand, with or without the support of MASUM. The village staff had successfully faced such challenges in their personal lives, with the firm belief that their rights were inalienable.

The village women<sup>80</sup> were not so confident in challenging conventional ways of thinking. They seemed to be overwhelmed by a feeling of helplessness and oppression by society and its expectations. According to them, "It is easy for others to suggest solutions, but if you are in the dilemma yourself, it is a different thing altogether". Some even remarked that the only option would be suicide! "If I were Sheela, I would never survive such stress", one of them stated.

Some of the women felt that life threatening situations, such as in Asha's case, would force them to stay with their natal family and to make an independent living. However, they would go to an NGO like MASUM for advice on reconciliation. One group of village women

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<sup>79</sup> Sample 'b'

<sup>80</sup> Sample 'a'



declared that if they were in Rani's place, the maximum they would dare to do is to try and convince their husbands about the worth of either sex and they would leave the rest to their prayers. They felt that the situation would be very much out of control and thus in their perception it would only invoke a sense of despair. One woman was more optimistic about her ability. She shared a positive personal experience of how she was able to convince her husband into taking treatment for her problem of white discharge, and therefore felt that one had to make persistent efforts and not just submit.

The group of village women that discussed Drupada's case had painted an image of a 'super-woman' and over-burdened her with responsibilities. It is interesting to mention that women took it on themselves to fulfill the duties of an "elected" *Gram Panchayat* member, but to satisfy all other household and farm obligations at the same time. Most groups remarked that they would accept help from MASUM. They would seek the organisation's help to get what they desired – whether a need or a right.

It may therefore be inferred from the above data that merely being able to identify rights or name rights is not equivalent to believing in the inalienability of them. Problems occur because many village women believe in the need-based approach and needs ironically remain ignored. In an attempt to fulfill the latter, the women often have to pay a high price, i.e. they have to compromise their rights. As mentioned above, the women, thereupon, often feel despair and helplessness, which even drives them into committing suicide. Assertion of rights is more challenging than needs assertion for women, since assertion puts demands on duty holders whereas need appeals to sensitivities of the duty holders who are in control of the fulfillment of need.

## **Asserting Rights - Challenging Social Norms**

### ***Real Life Story of Vimal (name changed)***

Vimala is a 24 year old young woman who was married when she was barely 15 years in 1997. She joined MASUM in the year 2000 as a *Sathi* (para legal worker). She narrates.....

"It is just 7 months that I lost my husband. He died of HIV/AIDS. My husband had been falling sick often for the past 3-4 years. He told me that had TB and took treatment at the local hospital. One day, two years ago, I had accompanied him, when at the hospital drug counter I realised that he had HIV/AIDS.

" I was completely taken aback, I felt as if the ground under my feet had slipped away. I was also fuming with rage because I knew that being a truck driver he must have visited prostitutes. I felt deceived and cheated. However, I managed to play cool and got a re-test done – which confirmed the illness. I realised that I too was not aware of AIDS and its risks. I had to gather guts and get myself and my children tested!. Fortunately for us we were saved! My next mission was to see that he took care, stopped drinking and driving – so that it would not complicate matters for me. My second child was just an infant – I had to keep my cool!



“ I had learnt about AIDS and HIV from MASUM’s trainings and the stigma that society attached to it. I was aware of the rights of an HIV/AIDS patient and I vowed to take care of him physically and mentally. I encouraged him to do work in the fields after his health improved, instead of just sitting around in the house. He however was adamant and stubbornly rejoined his truck driving. It was over this that we had abusive quarrels and fights. He fell ill again”.

“ By this time my inlaw and the village came to know of his illness. Every body stayed away from as. Only my brother supported my decisions. I had the option to leave everything here and go to my natal home – where doors were open to me. But I felt why should I lose all that I have earned in this village and leave my rightful home. As days passed by, his condition worsened and I nursed him day in and day out. Finally, I had to admit him to a hospital where he survived for only 10 days. No relatives or villagers except for my brothers and the MASUM staff came for his funeral; so much for the fear for the HIV/AIDS.

“ To top it all, my in-law and other relatives in the village blamed me for his death. They alleged that because I insisted that he works that he started driving again and died. I put up a brave front to them though it did hurt me a lot. Probably they were against my taking a more dominant role and making demands – that is not what a wife usually does!

“ Even today I have not given up my attire of a married woman living with a husband. I put the marriage beads (*Mangalsutra*) around my neck and wear the red *Kumkum* on my forehead. I don’t appear to be a “widow”. People may talk of me, but I know I am an independent woman and make choices and take my own decisions. Although I have lost a precious person, I have not lost everything. I have lots to do in life for my children and also for other woman who suffer like me. I want to be a role model to others and prove that I can make a family, without a man. MASUM’s trainings and continued support helped me throughout the crisis “ As Vimala ended – she explained. “My understanding of rights and human rights has made me more courageous and I am able to take practical decisions. At this point in time I feel considerable pressure and stress when I think of the challenges that I have taken and the long way I have to go. I am trying to be emotionally calm and taking help for this from my colleagues– but I know I will achieve my goal!”

Thus we find that a holistic understanding of human rights and belief in them has encouraged staff women to apply it in their own lives, and has brought about changes. They have learnt to question conventional social norms and reasoned out objectively. Vimala asks – “Why should I not wear red *Kumkum*? I refuse to smear my forehead with the black powder “*Bukka*” that a widow wears. I have right to wear what I wish and am fully justified to wear *Kumkum*”.



# Strengthening Rights Through Collective Action

Collective action and collective strength are two essential features in MASUM's campaign for the women. The relevance of collective action is discussed below.

All village women<sup>81</sup> believed in collective strength of vulnerable groups and collective action. This belief manifested itself many times during the FGDs and in the other discussions. For instance, they expressed that the *Dalit Sarpanch* in the case story or the female member of the *Gram Panchayat* would not be able to stand for justice to a victim of sexual harassment if the perpetrator was an influential person. They would require the support of women's groups. They explained that: "if there are people who support me in stopping violence and help me with accessing education and employment in order to become financially independent, even my parents won't oppose my decision of breaking my marriage."

Women consider *Mahila Mandals* to be support groups to women such as Munni, Rani or Asha. The former have the potential to give women sufficient courage to talk with their families and husbands and to provide emotional support to the *Dalit* girl, the victim of sexual abuse, so that she feels prepared to stand up for her rights. Some women also hoped that *Mahila Mandals* would provide the necessary immediate material support, such as money or shelter. They expect *Mahila Mandals* to act as pressure groups to make stake-holders<sup>82</sup> accountable, to give back a woman's rights in property and *Streedhan*<sup>83</sup> and to bring about out-of-court settlements in case of family disputes.

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<sup>81</sup> Sample 'a'

<sup>82</sup> Like the natal family in case of Asha, the husband/in-law in the case of Munni and Rani, and the Gram Panchayat and the public health department in the case of Drupada and Sheela

<sup>83</sup> Gifts received by a woman at the time of marriage and all ornaments worn by her

Women believe that the *Mahila Mandals* are source of information to women and can spread awareness among all villagers on women's rights, laws and discriminatory practices in the community. Demonstrating peacefully and assertively, forming public opinion on various issues that are not considered by the village governance system or other public service systems<sup>84</sup>, following up and tracking issues that need to be looked after by state agencies are some of the ways the collectives act.

There was a small difference in the responses given by the MASUM's village staff<sup>85</sup> and the village women<sup>86</sup>. In every case discussed in the FGDs, the village staff referred to the role of collective action as bringing out 'private issues' into the 'public domain', ensuring rights and the fulfillment of state obligations and accountability. The ways in which the village staff utilise collective strength becomes obvious in the three cases which they narrated.

One - in which a woman brought up the issue to the village governance system, pressuring the village to take action against the perpetrators of violence. "A woman from our village was burnt to death by her husband. An emergency meeting was called which 60-70 women attended. The issue was taken up in the *Mahila Mandal*, where the husband was summoned and questioned. The *Sarpanch* took the initiative to admit the woman's son to a hostel and sent the other two children to their maternal uncle. The engagement of the police and the village *Sarpanch* and *Gram Panchayat* were both results of the pressure that we and the village women imposed in order to fulfill state obligations. An example is being set to prevent such atrocities in the village."

Two - in which women collectively took action to rescue a woman from a violent home. "A woman was subjected to a lot of violence by her husband. MASUM women decided to talk to her and after which they mobilized a support group of 18 women to inform the police. As a collective of 20- 30 people, the village women and some men, together with the police went to the victim's matrimonial house and confronted her in-laws. The latter commented that their daughter in-law did not behave properly and that they would not want her there. The victim was rescued and escorted to the police station and later taken to her natal home."<sup>87</sup>

Three - in which the women took action to stop sale of alcohol in the village. "We were able to mobilize village women against alcohol sale; we searched for alcohol dens, bust them and booked them under law. We did not fully depend on police for action as we know that they are hand-in-glove with boot-leggers. We showed them (the police) the dens and pressurised them to take action. We also dealt with political interference and faced all kinds of threats.

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<sup>84</sup> Health, Education, Legal Machinery, Police etc.

<sup>85</sup> Sample 'b'

<sup>86</sup> Sample 'a'

<sup>87</sup> Unfortunately, when the husband returned and was notified of what had happened, he persuaded a Police Patil to bring his wife back to her matrimonial house. It is said that the beatings continued and that the victim now does not talk about the abuses to the public.



We successfully stopped alcohol sale in that village (Malshiras) for some time. We realised that collective action can produce results and also make the law work”.

The staff members’ approach was to become confrontational only when issues seemed to be non-negotiable or would not get resolved by peaceful dialogue.

The village women, however, took extreme stands; either submissive or highly aggressive. One group said that the *Mahila Mandal* should pressurize Asha’s in-laws to give Asha another “chance” if she made any mistake. The *Mahila Mmandal* should threaten her in-laws by warning them that if they ill-treated the daughter-in-law, she would take revenge and ill-treat them in their old age. Some village women also expected that *Mahila Mandals* to take law in their own hands, fine the influential sex-offender, punish him, beat him etc. They felt that corrupt legal practices would not ensure justice and insisted that she would get justice only from other village women and not from law. One group looked at *Mahila Mandals* as a mechanism for accessing law and claiming legal rights.

From the above responses, it may be inferred that all women believed in collective action for asserting, protecting and claiming rights. While the village staff envisaged assertive means, the village women were either submissive or took a highly aggressive approach. The fact that village women believe in collective strength is a real breakthrough for MASUM and an indicator of MASUM’s effectiveness.





# Changes In The Society And Current Challenges For MASUM

MASUM, the acronym of “Mahila Sarvangeen Utkarsh Mandal” meaning a “Women’s Forum for Integrated Development”, began its work in 1987 in the drought-prone area of Purandar Taluka. Catering to the health needs of women was their priority. At first MASUM workers went from door to door to promote health education and low- cost rational drugs on generic names. The local village women participated as health educators and as dispensers of common drugs. While visiting women in their homes and engaging in conversations with them, MASUM learnt that there was tremendous indebtedness among poor women, especially during illness. MASUM consequently organized microcredit groups,<sup>88</sup> particularly based on the participation of marginalized sections of the society. *Streedhan*, the micro credit programme started in 1990, when caste discrimination was more evident. Slowly, over a period of 19 years, more and more women have been trained in various activities such as health education and dealing with issues of violence, tailoring classes for girls and young women, which are combined with classes about human rights and self- defence, value education programmes with children, and many others.

As mentioned above, MASUM adopted the strategy of selecting and training the local women who are most marginalised due to their caste. As these women began to implement various programme activities they earned recognition and status<sup>89</sup>.

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*The name of the project which deals with these micro-credit groups is “Streedhan” Evidence of this can be found in the example of upper caste women accepting treatment from a Dalit Sadaphuli.*

One senior village *Sadaphuli* (health worker), Laxmi, narrates her experience with MASUM. In 1972 (pre MASUM), severe droughts had hit the villages. People were provided jobs through the government's employment guarantee scheme, in which she was also involved. Water was supplied through tankers. She noticed that *Dalits* were the last ones to receive water<sup>90</sup> and that there was resistance to share water with *Dalits*. Laxmi took the initiative to give some of her water to a *Dalit* woman and proved that people who interact with *Dalits* did not consequently suffer any harm as customs made them to believe. Initially, however, the villagers condemned her for having shared her water with *Dalits*. Only about a year after the first incidence, when water scarcity had worsened, social barriers seemed to loosen. After some time, sharing food with *Dalits* at marriages became practice and many other changes of that sort were observed.

Although *Dalits* and non- *Dalits* had come closer, these developments were not the result of any change in society's value system, but were acts of mere convenience. Hence, non- *Dalits* would shop from *Dalits* but not eat from their food. Discrimination and the belief of *Dalit*-untouchability prevailed.

Laxmi held that MASUM's more systematic efforts to abolish discrimination, finally succeeded in making non- *Dalits* realize that the caste- system is inherently discriminatory, and in creating bridges to transcend the boundaries between different castes and classes. Manisha Gupte and Dr. Ramesh Awasthi themselves would visit *Dalit* homes and eat from them so as to set examples. The villagers were convinced that if such reputable people would eat from *Dalits* and no harm was caused to them, then they too would be fine.

MASUM focused on (a) making the government responsible to provide basic necessities free of charge, such as medicine and holding the government to account where it failed to do so, (b) educating the villagers about the discriminating nature of certain customs and beliefs, and (c) averting certain groups of people from being stigmatised, e.g. people who are HIV+ or suffer from AIDS, widows and deserted women, TB patients etc.

Laxmi explained that MASUM had established a space in the public domain for all women irrespective of caste, class or religion they belong to. MASUM initiates, participates and mobilizes village women and youth in all campaigns and networks promoting pluralism and equality. The effect of this is a sense of unity and fraternity among the women.

While on the one hand, the villagers recognize the role of MASUM, understand its rights based perspective, seek help from MASUM and participate in MASUM's activities, they also assume MASUM's staff to be responsible for the establishment of peace and non-violence in the village. A woman from one of the villages in which MASUM is active, was in flames one evening. Apart from a volunteer *Sathi*<sup>91</sup>, who threw water on the victim to extinguish the flames,

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<sup>90</sup> That is if they were provided with drinking facilities at all  
<sup>91</sup> Paralegal Worker



nobody in the village turned to help her. After the incidence, the villagers started blaming MASUM for not preventing the burning. This may be an indicator for the villages taking ownership over services such as a *Sathi* or a *Sadaphuli* and consequently feeling legitimised to hold the latter to account. However, it could also reveal that the villagers shirk their own responsibility to ensure safety of women and place the onus completely on the MASUM workers. This further suggests that the villagers have not fully grasped the idea of civil duties and obligations and their accountability towards other members of the society- all components of the rights- based approach.

Six other cases of violence against women occurred in the same village and it is suspected that a further motive for such atrocities could be the villagers' attempt to affirm their positions and to prove to MASUM that nothing will change. To prove that the villagers have an upper hand and not MASUM.

"It is a struggle for women with progressive thoughts" the village staff (sample c) proclaimed during the discussion. They gave several examples of back-lash experience when women tried to assert rights within their home or in the community, in their personal lives or in lives of other women. The most common experience is family dissuading them from working with MASUM, people trying to break women's support groups by pitching one against the other, threats from police, people questioning the genuinity of MASUM's work and alleging that village staff are working for money.

These are currently the biggest challenges faced by MASUM.

At present, MASUM works on an activity called *Gav-Karbhar* in which the involvement of the entire village especially women in village governance is aimed at. The ultimate goal is to enable village people to deal with matters of their villages, rather than depend on the help of outsiders. The activity has a very democratic outlook and focuses on establishing *Gram-Sabha* (general body meeting of the village) as a platform for interactive discussions in which everyone can take part. MASUM states that this new activity has resulted in an increase in work efficiency of *Gram-Panchayat* (village council), strengthening of support groups, and enhanced ability to resolve village problems. The villagers discuss various issues in meetings.

This activity also empowers men from the marginalised groups of society and enables them to have a voice. They are confident enough to speak out their opinions before villagers of higher social ranks. It is one strategy by which the village would take complete ownership for promoting human rights and in the process take over MASUM's purpose.





## Chapter 9

# Conclusion

The study documented the attitudes of ordinary village women and those village women who had become part of MASUM. MASUM provided the latter with intensive training not only to acquire skills related to health care, counseling and law, but also to gain perspective on women's empowerment and human rights. These women now participate and lead various projects of MASUM and furthermore, are able to help change the lives of other women facing discrimination and injustice.

Throughout this study, the responses of the empowered MASUM staff members<sup>92</sup> were compared to those of other village women<sup>93</sup>, both coming from similar backgrounds. Certain differences and similarities as to how the two samples approached and understood the rights- based approach in development and women's empowerment became apparent.

The results of this research seemed to demonstrate that all the women have notions of rights, discrimination and inequality. They were all able to clearly identify caste and gender discrimination, right-holders, duty holders and other stake holders responsible for promoting rights. However, only the village staff seemed to possess the legal vocabulary. They were able to name rights, spell out the nature of rights violation and could link how violation of one right leads to the violation of other rights.

The village women used the vocabulary of needs and also had the tendency to apply a need- based approach. Although they were able to separate the latter from a rights- based approach and identified it as a kind of begging, it seemed that they were only able to define and understand the rights- based approach to a limited degree and at times superficially. The women

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<sup>92</sup> Sample 'b'

<sup>93</sup> Sample 'a'

could not comprehend the complex association (domino effect) that violation of a right can have on another right. The relationship between rights violations and development impediment too did not seem to be comprehensible. Many village women approved of the pattern that a rapist should get married to his victim, not recognizing that this would violate her right to security, health – physical and emotional - and above all, self-determination. Furthermore, several women rejected reservation for women in *Gram Panchayats* regarding these as discriminatory. They failed to see that reservation initially helps to create fairer chances of women's political participation. Furthermore, they were unable to look at dowry in the political context that reduces a woman to an object or a commodity.

Many village women seemed to believe that a woman has certain privileges, rather than rights, which she loses if she does not behave in the required manner, e.g. a woman has the privilege of not being raped only if she does not provoke the man, wives have the privilege of a monogamous marriage only if they bear children and boys in particular, a woman has the privilege of owning her natal house only if she would be able to take care of her parents and contraception is a man's responsibility only if he is of that opinion.

The staff members, on the other hand, believed in the rights-based approach and were mostly confident in applying it too. They knew the difference between rights and needs and were able to articulate this very well using the language of rights. They were able to name rights, to spell out the nature of rights violation, to link how violation of one right leads to violation of other rights and to make causal links between right violations and other negative effects. In their eyes, a woman should assert her freedom of movement and not be forced to go home before dark as this would contribute to limiting a woman's development opportunities. They also understood that affirmative actions, such as having reservation for women in *Gram Panchayat*, are necessary to ensure that women have fair chance of participating in governance of the village.

The staff women were convinced that rights violations should not be tolerated and that the use of legal instruments is the best method for dispute resolution. They believed that disputes between husband and wife should be discussed; if this does not lead to a resolution, however, the wife should seek help from outside and not tolerate violence.

Both groups identified legal instruments that could be used to claim rights. The village staff, however, was able to point out the provisions of law and was more gender conscious. Both groups remained skeptical about realizing rights through the use of law due to the tedious, costly and corrupt legal system.

The answers of and discussions among the village women signified that mere imposition of laws does not lead to a successful rights-based approach. Despite the existence of laws against child marriages the practice continues. A contributing factor to this could be the tradition of providing dowry at the time of marrying off one's daughter. Girls become an additional financial burden and are to be married off as early as possible and before they become sexually active. The family will no longer have to finance the girl once she is married.



The practice of arranged marriages also continues. The tradition of dowry was not totally rejected by the village women, as it could affect their financial needs and the fact that financially independent women are yet exceptional. Thus, the prevalence of child marriages could indicate that other components of the rights- based approach such as education and making women financially independent are not fully appreciated yet.

Both, staff members and village women, were aware of inequalities and discrimination in the society. While the former were resolute to continue asserting their rights, the village women often seemed to give up hope of changing the tradition.

The village women did not tend to challenge existing social norms, but preferred to accept rights violations in order to maintain their positions and reputations within the society. In that respect, they maintained that women should not tell outsiders if they face violence at home, a rapist should marry his victim since it will be hard for her to find a husband and being unmarried is a stigma and a woman should abort if her husband threatens to leave her if she doesn't.

Social norms did not seem to intimidate the staff members and they were happy and confident enough to challenge them if rights were violated. Throughout the study the staff women constantly defied social norms and traditional practices which violated women's rights, such as child marriages, being compelled to come home before dark, keeping quiet about domestic violence, neither having ownership in the matrimonial nor in the natal house, unequal wages for men and women, educating only boys, bigamous marriages and arranged marriages.

In some cases, however, the staff members were unclear as to why they preferred the rights- based approach. They could not explain why a victim should not get married to her rapist. They also did not determinedly oppose dowry and failed to recognize politics of patriarchy in this practice. This indicates that there were still some grey areas within the rights- based approach which the staff women too did not comprehend.

Some village women believed that they had to compromise some rights due to certain social realities. Hence, a woman should be home before dark and thus sacrifice her freedom of movement since the danger of being raped is grater at night. Compromises were made in taking decisions in a certain way due to social circumstances. This conveys a degree of passiveness within the village women who chose to remain in the position of the victim, rather than to find ways of confronting aggressive male behavior and asserting their freedoms.

It was observed that the village women generally believed in the need to be financially independent. Many believed that girls should be sent to school and women should be guaranteed jobs.

Both, staff members and village women understood the concept of different types of accountability. In reality, however, the village leadership have often tried to evade responsibility when rights violations occur by blaming MASUM for not preventing them. It shows that there is lack of clarity on the part of duty holders and also lack of willingness to accept their duties and responsibilities.

Collective action is one of the strategies to support empowered village women and an instrument that all village women believed in. They considered such collectives as resource of information and support for women and other less powerful individuals such as *Dalits*. They also regarded collective action as a mechanism for pressure groups and networks to fight for justice. The strong belief in collective strength is a real breakthrough for MASUM.

In conclusion, it may be inferred from this study that the staff members understood and employed the rights- based approach to development and women's empowerment to a far greater extent than other village women. The latter seemed to understand most of the concepts associated with the rights- based approach; however they tended to apply the need- based approach in their strategies to solve problems. Lack of awareness as well as opportunities could be factors for the lesser degree of acceptance among them. The study, moreover, revealed that those who had been trained by MASUM tended to support the rights- based approach, to help empowering other women and to bring about social change. Thus, the relevance of this report lies in the evidence that women, who are used to applying the need- based approach to development, can and often apply the rights- based approach once they are familiarized with it.



## Appendix 1

# Case Stories

### Case No. 1 : Case of Drupada

Drupada has been elected into the *Gram Panchayat* of her village under the women's reservation quota. Her husband was the previous village head. The present elected village head is a *Dalit* man. Drupada's husband still looks after most of the village affairs though he is not an officially elected *Gram Panchayat* member now. Drupada has no time to attend *Gram Panchayat* meetings as she is always busy looking after their fields and sending milk to the dairy. She only attends every third meeting so that her membership is not questioned. The attendance register along with the snacks are sent over to her home for signatures during each meeting. The local women's group now wants to take up the case of a young *Dalit* woman who was sexually harassed by an influential person in the village. They are thinking of approaching the new *Sarpanch* so that he can raise it in the next *Gram Panchayat* meeting.

#### Questions Posed

- ☞ What do you think Drupada would be able to do in this situation? What stand do you think she will take?
- ☞ What should she do as an elected *Gram Panchayat* member?
- ☞ Whose rights are being violated here? By whom?
- ☞ Can the protectionist approach taken here towards a female *Gram Panchayat* member lead to equality? Please explain.
- ☞ What do you think the new *Dalit Sarpanch* will do? What should he do?

- ☞ What would you have done if you were in Drupada's position?
- ☞ In what ways should the local *Mahila Mandal* intervene?
- ☞ Would law help this female *Dalit* victim? If yes, how?

## Case No. 2: Case of Asha

Asha has been deserted by her husband for the past two years. He used to beat her up because her family did not fulfill their dowry demands. Asha lives with her parents, her younger sister and her brother's wife. The family is now looking for a bridegroom for Asha's younger sister, so they don't want to have Asha staying at home. They feel that it will affect the younger daughter's prospect of a good marriage if the boy's family gets to know that the elder daughter is not cohabiting with her husband. Asha's husband is ready to take Asha back. He says that he will re-marry if she does not return.

### Questions Posed

- ☞ What should Asha do?
- ☞ What options does she have?
- ☞ Whose rights are being violated against? By whom?
- ☞ Which rights are being violated against?
- ☞ Which rights does she have in her parents' home and in her husband's home?
- ☞ What kind of support does she need and from whom?
- ☞ What would you have done if you were in Asha's position?
- ☞ What would you have done if you were Asha's relatives or neighbors?
- ☞ In what way can a local *Mahila Mandal* intervene?

## Case No. 3 : Case of Sheela

Sheela is part of a savings group. She has been taking loan for a long time and has been repaying them on time, too. Her husband is now sick with AIDS. All her loans go into getting medicines for him. She also has to take care of him as no one from the family wants to touch him. She is now unable to repay the loans on time. Due to the pressure of the savings group to repay the money, she had to borrow money from a moneylender at a very high interest rate. She has now repaid her loan to the savings group, but they will not give her any more loans. Sheela went to the bank, but they said that her husband has some unpaid debts and so she can't get any loan from them. The house and the field are on her husband's name, so she has no asset to mortgage with the bank.



### Questions Posed

- ☞ What should Sheela do?
- ☞ What options does Sheela have?
- ☞ Do you think any rights are being violated against?
- ☞ Whose rights are violated against? By whom?
- ☞ What kind of support does Sheela need and from whom?
- ☞ What should Sheela's rights be?
- ☞ What options do you think she will have once her husband dies?
- ☞ What should she do in order to protect her rights?
- ☞ What would you do if you were in Sheela's position?
- ☞ What would you do if you were Sheela's relatives or neighbors?
- ☞ In what way can a local *Mahila Mandal* intervene?
- ☞ Will law help? How?

### Case No. 4 : Case of Rani

Rani has been married for the past five years. She has one daughter. Now the family wants a son. They know of one doctor in the city who tells the sex of the fetus. He charges a lot of money and the entire process is a secret. Rani's husband is a contractor and a *Gram Panchayat* member. He will have to resign from the *Gram Panchayat* if he has more than two children. He says that if he gets another daughter, he will leave Rani, get married again and hide the fact that he has any children. That way he can get the desired son. Being a *Gram Panchayat* member gives him many contracts and he is willing to pay out of that for the sex-determination.

### Questions Posed

- ☞ What should Rani do?
- ☞ What options does she have?
- ☞ Are any rights being violated against?
- ☞ Whose rights are violated against? By whom?
- ☞ What kind of support does she need and from whom?
- ☞ What would you do if you were in Rani's position?

- ☞ What would you do if you were Rani's relatives or neighbors?
- ☞ What are your thoughts about finding out the sex of the fetus?
- ☞ What do you think about the rule that people have to resign from the *Gram Panchayat* if they have more than two children?
- ☞ In what way should a local *Mahila Mandal* intervene?
- ☞ Can law help Rani? If yes, how?

## Case No. 5 : Case of Munni

Munni has been having white discharge for the past three months. She is unable to talk to her husband or her mother-in-law about it. Because she finds intercourse painful, she has been refusing sex, which in turn has made her husband believe that she has another lover. The local government hospital does not have a gynecologist and they are busy with family planning work, so they do not bother much about white discharge or cervical prolepses. Munni doesn't know what to do.

### Questions Posed

- ☞ What should Munni do?
- ☞ What options does Munni have?
- ☞ Are any rights being violated here?
- ☞ Whose rights are being violated against? By whom?
- ☞ What kind of support does she need and from whom?
- ☞ What are the responsibilities of the government hospital?
- ☞ Will Munni be able to talk to her husband? If yes, how will she find the strength to do so?
- ☞ What would you have done if you were in Munni's place?
- ☞ What would you have done if you were Munni's relatives or neighbors?
- ☞ What are the responsibilities of PHCs (public health centers)?
- ☞ In what way can a local *Mahila Mandal* intervene?
- ☞ Will law help Munni? If yes, how?



## Appendix 2

# Questionnaire

St. No.	Statement	Yes	No	Comments
1	Women are responsible for the beatings they get from their husbands.			
2	Women have the right to choose their husbands.			
3	Women should come home before the dark.			
4	Children don't obey unless they are beaten.			
5	Boys are more intelligent than girls.			
6	Growing boys should be given more food than girls.			
7	Dowry if given willingly should be accepted.			
8	The daughter-in-law should seek police help if she is abused.			
9	There should be reserved seats for women in the <i>Gram Panchayat</i>			
10	It is OK for a man to marry a second wife if he does not bear children or sons from the first wife.			
11	Women should not speak to outsiders if they are beaten. They should resolve the problem within the house.			
12	Boys deserve more education than girls.			

Cont...

St. No.	Statement	Yes	No	Comments
13	Women should live in their husband's home at any cost.			
14	It is best to get the daughters married off early, or else she will engage in sexual activities.			
15	If the boy's family refuses dowry, there must be something wrong with the boy.			
16	Women should not participate in politics.			
17	Women should get equal rights in the property of her natal family.			
18	Women should use contraceptives rather than men.			
19	Women should be owners of the house and property alongside their husbands.			
20	Men rape because women provoke them.			
21	Women should get the same wages as men for the same work.			
22	A rapist should marry the woman he rapes.			
23	NGOs such as MASUM should provide such good health-care services that women need not go to government-run centers.			



## Tables of Responses and Frequencies Among the Village Women

**Table No. 1**

Women are responsible for the beatings they get.

Group	Yes	No	No Response Cannot Say	Total
I	8	8	0	16
II	6	9	1	16
III	5	11	0	16
IV	8	9	0	17
<b>Total</b>	27 = 41.5%	37 = 56.9%	1 = 1.6%	65 = 100%
<b>Village Staff</b>	0	12	0	12

### ***Comments With Answer 'Yes'***

- a The mistake she makes is worth the beating if it is serious.
- b The husband, too, must be at fault (you cannot clap with one hand).
- c She must have committed some mistake and, hence, is beaten.

### ***Comments With The Answer 'No'***

- a Women get beaten even if they are not at fault.
- b The husband searches for a reason to beat his wife.
- c The husband also makes mistakes! It does not mean one should be beaten.
- d They (husband and wife) are at fault – the fault is on both sides – it is not one-sided.
- e He beats because of his alcohol addiction.
- f The husband is also at fault but we are not allowed to tell them off.

**Table No. 2**

Children don't obey unless they are beaten.

Group	Yes	No	No Response Cannot Say	Total
I	6	10	0	16
II	5	10	1	16
III	3	12	1	16
IV	8	8	1	17
Total	22 = 33.8%	40 = 61.6 %	3 =4.6%	65 =100%
Village Staff	0	12	0	12

**Comments With Answer 'Yes'**

- a Children deserve to be beaten if they make serious mistakes.
- b If they do not obey even after being explained, they need a good beating – only then will they obey.

**Comments With Answer 'No'**

- a Children also obey if they are explained so that they understand properly.

**Comments With 'No - Response' Answer**

- a If they do not obey even after being explained, they need a good beating – only then will they obey.



**Table No. 3**

Men Rape Because Women Provoke Them

Group	Yes	No	No Response Cannot Say	Total
I	2	12	2	16
II	0	14	2	16
III	3	9	4	16
IV	1	13	3	17
Total	6 = 9.3%	48 = 73.8%	11 = 16.9%	65 = 100%
Village Staff	0	11		11

**Comments With Answer 'Yes'**

- a Some girls provoke.

**Comments With Answer 'No'**

- a In fact, men force the women to have intercourse without consent.

**Comments With 'No - Response' Answer**

- a Oh, don't ask me such a question; it is something that I just cannot understand.
- b Rape happens to "half mad" girls.

**Table No. 4**

Women should not speak to outsiders if they are beaten. They should try to resolve the problem within the house.

Group	Yes	No	No Response Cannot Say	Total
I	10	5	1	16
II	8	8	0	16
II	4	12	0	16
IV	12	4	1	17
Total	34 = 52.3%	29 = 44.6%	2 = 3.1%	65 = 100%
Village Staff	0	12	0	12

**Comments With Answer 'Yes'**

- a But if the problem does not get resolved, it can develop into something extreme.
- b It should get resolved at home, but if not, women should seek MASUM's help.
- c But if it does not get resolved, then what?
- d Resolving it within the home is worth-while ('Parvadte').

**Comments With Answer 'No'**

- a Instead of keeping the problems within the home, they should be brought into the public.
- b It never gets resolved within the matrimonial home; she has to tell her parents.
- c If she does not tell others, her suffering will not reduce.
- d Tell neighbors!

**Comments With 'No - Response' Answer**

- a She should try to resolve it within the home, but if it continues she should tell outsiders.



**Table No. 5**

The daughter-in-law should seek police help if she is abused.

Group	Yes	No	No Response Cannot Say	Total
I	13	3	0	16
II	13	3	0	16
III	12	4	0	16
IV	14	3	0	17
Total	52 = 80%	13 = 20%	00%	65 = 100%
Village Staff	10	1	0	11

**Comments With Answer 'Yes'**

- a However, police never give the desired response.
- b If there is injustice it should be voiced.
- c Yes, but she should also behave properly towards the others in the house.
- d If injustice is done to her, she should seek justice.
- e She should fight for justice!

**Comments With Answer 'No'**

- a She should go to MASUM.

**Table No. 6**

A rapist should marry the woman he rapes.

Group	Yes	No	No Response Cannot Say	Total
I	9	6	1	16
II	13	2	1	16
III	15	1	0	16
IV	10	4	3	17
Total	47 =72.3%	13 =20%	5 =7.7%	65 =100%
Village Staff	1	10	0	11

**Comments With Answer 'Yes'**

- a Word of rape spreads across villages; who would marry her then?
- b Yes, only if he is unmarried.
- c Or else she will never get married.
- d Yes, he should definitely marry her- no second thoughts!
- e Other wise she gets stigmatized
- f If he has children then he cannot marry her; otherwise he should.

**Comments With Answer 'No'**

- a If the victim is very young then he should not marry her.
- b If he is not in his 'senses' she should not be married to him.

**Comments With 'No - Response' Answer**

- a If the rapist is already a married man, he cannot marry the victim



**Table No. 7**

Women should come home before dark.

Group	Yes	No	No Response Cannot Say	Total
I	12	4	0	16
II	13	2	1	16
III	16	0	0	16
IV	17	2	0	17
Total	58 = 89.2%	6 = 9.23%	1 = 1.5%	65 = 100%
Village Staff	0	12	0	12

**Comments With Answer 'Yes'**

- a She could get abused.
- b There are 'bad social elements' which women should avoid!
- c Women should stay at home!
- d It is the mother who should be watchful.

**Comments With Answer 'No'**

- a If she has to stay back on account of some work.
- b It depends on the home atmosphere, how strict/ flexible the parents/ husband/ in-laws are.
- c But that woman should have the capability/ strength to face any kind of attack on her.

**Table No. 8**

It is best to get the daughters married off early, or else they will get into sexual activities.

Group	Yes	No	No Response Cannot Say	Total
I	4	12	0	16
II	3	10	3	16
III	5	11	0	16
IV	7	8	2	17
Total	19 =29.2%	41 =63.1%	5 =7.7%	65 =100%
Village Staff	0	11	0	11

**Comments With Answer 'Yes'**

- a You can never trust girls!
- b Sometimes they are likely to get into such activities.
- c One of the ways to see that she does not get into sexual activities is to get her married at the right age.

**Comments With Answer 'No'**

- a A young girl's body is not physically grown/ mature enough for a marriage.
- b She is also not mentally matured.
- c She should be married only at the right age and not too early.
- d She should be married only after 18. But to ensure that she is safe, she should be kept fully occupied in household activities.
- e If the mother keeps an eye on her, she will be safe.



**Table No.9**

Women should be co-owners of house and property alongside their husbands.

Group	Yes	No	No Response Cannot Say	Total
I	16	0	0	16
II	15	1	0	16
III	16	0	0	16
IV	14	0	3	17
Total	61 = 93.9%	1 = 1.5%	3 = 4.6%	65 = 100%
Village Staff	10	1	0	11

**Comments With Answer 'Yes'**

- a Yes, it is her right!
- b It is useful in difficult times.
- c Because the house belongs to both of them.

**Table No.10**

Women should get equal rights in the property of her natal family.

Group	Yes	No	No Response Cannot Say	Total
I	14	1	1	16
II	15	1	0	16
III	7	5	4	16
IV	14	1	2	17
Total	50 = 76.9%	8 =12.3%	7 =10.8%	65 =100%
Village Staff	10	1	0	11

**Comments With Answer 'Yes'**

- a If the women desire so.
- b She should then also perform her duties.
- c If she wants equal rights in her natal home she should also take responsibility to take care of her parents.
- d She should get ownership rights but she is usually not given them easily.
- e She must get ownership rights!
- f Property will be a support to her so that she will be able to continue to stay with her husband/ in-laws, especially, if they are not doing well.

**Comments With Answer 'No'**

- a She cannot depend on her natal property!
- b She should get rights in her matrimonial home; why in her parental home?



**Table No.11**

Women should get the same wages as men for the same work.

Group	Yes	No	No Response Cannot Say	Total
I	13	2	1	16
II	15	0	1	16
III	15	1	0	16
IV	12	2	3	17
Total	55 = 84.6%	5 = 7.7%	5 = 7.7%	65 = 100%
Village Staff	10	1	0	11

**Comments With Answer 'Yes'**

- a Only if it is "equal work".
- b Yes, because women work just as much as men do.
- c Yes, because both of them work with both hands!

**Comments With Answer 'No'**

- a No, because in reality nobody will give equal wages to women. I can't even think of such an idea!

**Table No. 12**

There should be reservations for women in the *Gram Panchayat*.

Group	Yes	No	No Response Cannot Say	Total
I	14	1	1	16
II	13	2	1	16
III	16	0	0	16
IV	16	1	0	17
Total	59 =90.8%	4 =6.2%	2 =3.0%	65100%
Village Staff	11	1	0	12

**Comments With Answer 'Yes'**

- a A woman should get equal rights as men.
- b She should learn about politics, too!
- c She should know what is going on in the village.
- d Women should get half the seats.



**Table No. 13**

Women should not participate in politics.

Group	Yes	No	No Response Cannot Say	Total
I	7	8	1	16
II	4	11	1	16
III	5	11	0	16
IV	5	10	2	17
Total	21 = 32.3%	40 = 61.5%	4 = 6.2%	65 = 100%
Village Staff	0	11	0	11

**Comments With Answer 'Yes'**

- a Because, we are ignorant about politics.

**Comments With 'No - Response' Answer**

- a It is the woman's choice.
- b Sometimes husbands and in-laws do not consent to women getting into politics.
- c In order to increase her knowledge she should get into politics.

**Table No. 14**

Women should preferably use contraceptives rather than men.

Group	Yes	No	No Response Cannot Say	Total
I	6	8	2	16
II	1	11	4	16
III	0	12	4	16
IV	1	9	7	17
Total	8 = 12.3%	40 = 61.6%	17 = 26.1%	65 = 100%
Village Staff	1	10	0	11

**Comments With Answer 'Yes'**

- a It is their choice.
- b It is women who feel that the smaller the family, the happier it is; therefore, it is their responsibility to use contraception!

**Comments With Answer 'No'**

- a Both should use contraceptives!
- b No, because children belong to both of them.
- c Men should use contraceptives, too!
- d Trust between husband and wife is the most important thing. (Question seemed to have been understood differently – maybe in the context of infidelity?)

**Comments With 'No - Response' Answer**

- a We don't understand contraceptives, so we cannot say anything.
- b We don't use contraceptives.
- c Both have to decide together, it is up to them; I cannot say.



**Table No. 15**

A - Boys are more intelligent than girls.

B - Boys deserve more education than girls.

<div><div>A →</div><div>B ↓</div></div>	Yes	No	No Response	Total	Village Staff
Yes	6	9	1	16	0
No	7	38	2	47	11
No Response	1	1	0	2	0
Total	14	48	3	65	11
Village Staff	0	12	0	12	

**A**

**Comments With Answer 'Yes'**

- a Yes, my son is more intelligent than girls!

**Comments With Answer 'No'**

- a Girls are persistent and concentrate better.  
b Girls are more intelligent than boys.  
c Both are equally intelligent.  
d If girls get education they will become more intelligent.

**B**

**Comments With Answer 'Yes'**

- a Girls are academically weaker.  
b Even if she is educated, she will be married off ; so one should rather educate the boys.

**Comments With Answer 'No'**

- a Both equally deserve education.  
b They should be given equal education.  
c If girls are educated more, they will become self-reliant.  
d Both, boys and girls should be given as much education as they want.

**Comments With 'No - Response' Answer**

- a If a girl is more intelligent and is doing well, can one then say that boys deserve more education?

**Table No.16**

It is ok for men to remarry if they do not have sons / children.

Group	Yes	No	No Response Cannot Say	Total
I	6	10	0	16
II	6	10	0	16
III	10	6	0	16
IV	7	7	3	17
Total	29 =44.6%	33 =50.8%	3 =4.6%	65 =100%
Village Staff	0	12	0	12

**Comments With Answer 'Yes'**

- a With his first wife's consent he may marry.
- b Their progeny is priority!
- c His progeny should not end!

**Comments With Answer 'No'**

- a The fact that a couple cannot have children can lie with either the man or the woman.
- b They could adopt a son.
- c How can one allow that!
- d It should not be done!
- e No, but the wife consents then it is ok.

**Comments With 'No - Response' Answer**

- a If both agree then it is ok.



**Table No.17**

Women have the right to choose their husbands.

Group	Yes	No	No Response Cannot Say	Total
I	14	2	0	16
II	10	5	1	16
III	16	0	0	16
IV	17	0	0	17
Total	57 = 87.7%	7 = 10.8%	1 = 1.5.%	65
Village Staff	9	3	0	12

**Comments With Answer 'Yes'**

- a Yes, it is correct for girls to choose their husbands.
- b Girls should take their parents' consent though!
- c Yes, girls also have the right to choose their partners.
- d Yes, because she has to live with him all her life.
- d Nowadays, she has the right to, but earlier she did not have it.
- e 'They do choose!'

**Comments With Answer 'No'**

- a She is asked just for the sake of it. Ultimately, the decision is made by her family.

**Table No. 18**

Dowry if given willingly should be accepted.

Group	Yes	No	No Response Cannot Say	Total
I	8	7	1	16
II	10	4	2	16
III	12	3	1	16
IV	10	6	1	17
Total	40 = 61.5%	20 = 30.8%	5 = 7.7%	65 = 100%
Village Staff	2	10	0	12

**Comments With Answer 'Yes'**

- a It will be a financial support for the household.
- b People provide dowry because they can afford to do so!

**Comments With 'No - Response' Answer**

- a Accepting dowry is wrong, it should not be taken.
- b The dowry tradition must be abolished.



**Table No. 19**

If the boys or the family refuse dowry, then there must be something wrong with the boy.

Group	Yes	No	No Response Cannot Say	Total
I	4	9	3	16
II	4	12	0	16
III	7	7	2	16
IV	4	9	4	17
Total	19 =29.2%	37 =56.9%	9 =13.9%	65 =100%
Village Staff	0	12	0	12

**Comments With Answer 'Yes'**

- a He may not be really interested in the girl, hence, he does not accept the dowry.

**Comments With Answer 'No'**

- a There are few genuine people who don't believe in taking dowry.
- b The boy must be very independent and does not need it.
- c He may be really in love with the girl, so that dowry will make no difference for him.

**Table No. 20**

NGOs like MASUM should provide such good health services to women that they need not have to go to government- run hospitals.

Group	Yes	No	No Response Cannot Say	Total
I	13	1	2	16
II	11	4	1	16
III	14	0	2	16
IV	13	2	2	17
Total	51 =78.4%	7 =10.8%	7 =10.8%	65 =100%
Village Staff	0	11	0	11

**Comments With Answer 'Yes'**

- a Yes, but if the *Sadaphuli* tells her that she should go, she will.
- b Oh, that would be so good!
- c Yes, MASUM should give this service; that's why we are here today! We wanted to suggest that.

**Comments With 'No - Response' Answer**

- a We have to go to the government- run hospital.



## *Appendix 3*

# *List Of Social Norms*

- 1 Women/ girls should be allowed to seek education in college only if she can be home before it is dark
- 2 A woman should not have the freedom to abort if her family is against abortion.
- 3 There should not be reservation in educational institutions based on caste.
- 4 It is better to marry of the daughter even if it means that her education is discontinued.
- 5 If the husband beats the wife out of anger, there is no need to object to it.
- 6 If the husband is earning well, there is no need for the wife to earn.

# *Set Of Ten Rights And Freedoms*

- 1 Right to Life (a)
- 2 Right to Dignity (b)
- 3 Right to Food (c)
- 4 Rights to Housing (d)
- 5 Right to Education (e)
- 6 Right to Work/ Earn (f)
- 7 Right to Equal Treatment (g)
- 8 Right to Security (h)
- 9 Freedom of Choice (i)
- 10 Freedom of Mobility (j)



## Results of Ranking Exercise

Group Rank	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6	W7	W8
1	A	a	a	a	b	a	A	a	a	c	a	a	b
2	B	f	f	g	a	i	G	g	i	h	c	g	a
3	C	c	b	b	c	c	B	b	d	e	d	d	i
4	D	e	e	e	e	b	C	c	c	a	e	b	e
5	E	g	h	f	f	d	D	d	e	g	e	e	c
6	F	h	c	c	h	h	F	j	g	d	c	i	h
7	G	d	g	h	d	j	H	e	f	j	b	f	d
8	H	b	d	d	g	g	E	f	b	i	b	c	f
9	I	i	i	i	i	f	I	h	h	f	f	j	g
10	J	j	j	j	j	e	J	i	j	b	g	h	j

**Village Staff = S**

**Village Women = W**

# *Letter Of Informed Consent*

## **Informed Consent For Respondents**

**Title of Study :** 'Women's Notions Of Rights And Empowerment: A Case Study on MASUM's Area of Intervention in Rural Maharashtra'

**Researchers :** Prasanna Invally and Manisha Gupte on behalf of GRIST / MASUM

Dear Friend,

This letter is to request you to be a part of the research study on 'Women's Notions Of Rights And Empowerment: A Case Study on MASUM's Area of Intervention in Rural Maharashtra'. This study of women's notions of rights has been jointly undertaken by Grass Roots Initiatives for Social Transformation (GRIST) of Pune, India and Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women (KFAW), Kitakyushu (Japan). The information about both these organisations is being provided to you separately. The purpose is to document women's perception of rights and wrongs, their awareness of rights and human rights, their attitude towards the needs based and the rights based approach, their problem solving strategies in the use of rights- based strategies and the strength of collective action vis-à-vis the rights- based approach and the human rights framework.

This letter is to request you to give us your time (between three to four hours as part of a focus group) and enrich us with your experiences and wisdom. Since this is only a research study, you will not gain directly from this study. There is no pressure whatsoever to be part of the study. Your relationship with us or with MASUM will not be affected in any way if you refuse. You will also have the freedom to step out of the study at any time or to refuse giving answers to any questions that you may feel uncomfortable with or which may compromise your safety. Please feel free to refuse being photographed or taped if you don't feel comfortable



about the same. Confidentiality will be maintained about what you say. Unless you would like your name to be mentioned in the interview, your name and other details will be disguised. If you don't want your name mentioned in the study or in the acknowledgments, your identity will remain anonymous.

Please let us know if you would like to be part of the study. If you face any problems now or later on because of the study, please feel free to contact the MASUM office in Hadapsar at 020 26995625 or 26995633. You can also contact the members of the Ethics Committee, namely Dr. Jaya Sagade at the ILS Law College Pune or Dr. Sunita Bundewar, at the Centre for Studies in Ethics and Rights (CSER), Mumbai.

We look forward to a rich interaction with you.

With warm regards,

Manisha Gupte, Prasanna Invally and Miwa Atsuko

Date: August 2006

Dear Manisha and Prasanna,

I have read the above letter and I would like to be part of your study.

Date

Name

Signature

# *English Translation Of Local Words Used In The Text*

*Ardhangini* = The Other's Half

*Gram Panchayat* = Village Council

*Gram Sabha* = Village Meeting

*Mahila Mandal* = Women's Collective in the Villages

*Gram Panchayat* = Village Governance System

*Police Patil* = Assistant of the Police at Village Level

*Sadaphulis* = MASUM's Health Workers

*Sarpanch* = Elected Head of the Village Council

*Sathi* = MASUM's Paralegal Worker

*Streedhan* = Gifts Received by a Woman at the Time of Marriage and  
All Ornaments Worn by Her



## Appendix 7

# List Of Women Participated In Study

Asha Indalkar	Madhuri Chachar	Sangita Mane
Alka	Malan Ambale	Sangita Waghamare
Anandi Yadav	Malan Pawar	Sanjivani Lokhande
Anandi	Mangal	Seema Shedage
Anjana	Mangal Kunjir	Sharada
Charushila Kunjir	Mangal Magar	Sharada Kunjir
Chatura	Mangal Waghamare	Sheetal Chavan
Dhanvantari	Manisha Kunjir	Sujta Indalkar
Durga	Meena Kunjir	Suraiyya Maniyar
Jaya Nalage	Nirmala Moghe	Tarabai Indalkar
Jayashree Dixit	Nirmala More	Ujvala
Kalpana	Phulabai Jagtap	Ujvala Indalkar
Kalpana Indalkar	Pushpa	Ujvala Kunjir
Kalpana Yadav	Pushpa Netake	Ujvala Pawar
Lalita	Rohini Kunjir	
Lata Kumbhar	Rupali Kunjir	







